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The Vine of Sodom: A Literary Analysis of Judges 19-21

by

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Francis Landy

David Gay

Uri Margolin

September 24, 2001

For their vine is of the vine of Sodom, and the fields of Gomorrah:
their grapes are grapes of poison, their clusters are bitter.
(Deut 32:32)

For Ian,
my good husband.

ABSTRACT

Perhaps one of the most disturbing stories in Hebrew scripture is the story told in Judges 19 of the rape and dismemberment of a nameless daughter of Israel. The terrible violence perpetrated against this woman has invited criticism by a number of feminist scholars. The story is seen by some to promote and justify violence against women. It has been labeled "pornographic", and the storyteller has been accused of "rape by the pen." In this thesis I argue to the contrary: by means of a literary analysis of the text I offer a defense of the narrator and the story he tells. I endeavor to show that the narrator is the woman's greatest advocate; that the manner in which he tells his tale brings us to her side in compassion. He gives voice to the woman's anguish and to the anguish of all who suffer the unspeakable.

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INTRODUCTION

A liturgy for the *Exorcism of Patriarchal Texts*[1] is provided in Rosemary Radford Ruether's *Women-Church*, a guide for feminist liturgical communities. The exorcism involves the reading of a number of biblical texts that are deemed to have "clearly oppressive intentions". After each text is read, a bell is rung, and the community cries out in unison, "Out, demon, out!" Once all the texts have been read, someone says, "These texts and all oppressive texts have lost their power over our lives . . . we cast out their oppressive message as expressions of evil and justifications of evil."

One of the biblical texts singled out for exorcism in this liturgy is the story of a Levite and his concubine in the Book of Judges (chapter 19). In this story a nameless young woman is first gang raped by rogues and later dismembered by her own husband. Her story demands a response; in fact, it closes with a series of imperatives: "Consider it, take counsel, and speak out!" (Judg 19:30). Phyllis Trible presents us with a literary-feminist reading of this story in *Texts of Terror*. She makes the following assertion: "Truly, to speak for this woman is to interpret against the narrator, plot, other characters, and the biblical tradition because they have shown her neither compassion nor attention."[2]

Trible, like many feminist biblical critics, endeavors to explore ways in which biblical texts reflect and promote patriarchal ideas and interests.[3] Cheryl Exum also adopts this critical perspective. She addresses her attention to "the gender ideology that informs . . .

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[1] Radford Ruether (1985: 137).

[2] Trible (1984: 86).

[3] See Schüssler Fiorenza (1984) who argues that feminist hermeneutics must critically evaluate biblical texts as "patriarchal articulations". She claims, "feminist interpretation . . . begins with a ***hermeneutics of suspicion*** that applies to both contemporary androcentric interpretations of the Bible and the biblical texts themselves. Certain texts of the Bible can be used in the argument against women's struggle for liberation not only because they are patriarchally misinterpreted but because they are patriarchal texts and therefore can serve to legitimate women's subordinate role and secondary status in patriarchal society . . . " (p. xii) (emphasis mine).

biblical narratives in order to reveal strategies by which patriarchal literature excludes, marginalizes, and otherwise operates to subjugate women."[4] In her book, *Fragmented Women*, Exum examines the story of the Levite and his concubine in a chapter entitled "Raped by the Pen". She approaches the story with the intention of "breaking open the text's phallocentric ideology and exposing the buried and encoded messages it gives to women – messages upon which it relies to control women and keep them in their place."[5] She argues that representations of rape, like that in Judges 19, operate like pornography: they "perpetuate ways of looking at women that encourage objectification and violence."[6] From Exum's perspective the narrator of Judges 19 is guilty of complicity in the crimes against the woman, worse yet, he is guilty of "literary rape". She makes the bold assertion that "As *narrative punishment* for claiming sexual autonomy, Bath-sheber[7] is gang-raped and her sexuality is symbolically mutilated."[8] Exum grants that the intent of the narrator may be to elicit a sense of moral outrage in his readers, outrage at the behavior of the rapists as well as that of the Levite, but she claims that *beneath* this intent there lies a gender-motivated subtext, "a subtext motivated by male fear of female

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[4] Exum (1993: 9).

[5] Exum (1993: 177). Brenner (1996: 80) explicates the use of the term "phallocentric" in relation to biblical literature and the society that produced it: "the society that created biblical literature is a phallic, phallocentric society. This characterization is not an empty generalization; it does not imply mere reduction of socio-psychological state. The society thus referred to posits the human penis as the explicit, characteristic symbol of religious identity. The penis is the special link between its god and the members of the community. Circumcision . . . defines males as members of the community of the covenant. . .. By this same token, women are excluded a priori from that symbolic order. The bonding with the (male) god is stamped on the (male) body; the anti-woman bias is built into the symbolic order."

[6] Exum (1993: 170). See also Brenner (1996); Brenner and van Dijk-Hemmes (1993); and Gordon and Washington (1995).

[7] Exum (1993: 176) names the unnamed concubine Bath-sheber (daughter of breaking). She feels that in naming the woman readers are encouraged to take the woman's "personhood" seriously. Bal (1988: 89-90) makes a similar argument. She gives the woman "subjectivity" by naming her, Beth (house).

[8] Exum (1993: 200) (emphasis mine).

sexuality and by the resultant need of patriarchy to control women."[9] She argues that, while the text overtly censures the events of the narrative, submerged within it lies an implicit message directed to women that acts of sexual autonomy on their part are deserving of punishment. In other words, the literary rape and dismemberment of the woman in Judges 19 are the means by which the narrator communicates a "phallocentric ideology".

The foregoing condemnations of the narrator and his[10] text are harsh ones. Contrary to critics like Radford Ruether, Trible, and Exum, I hope to posit a defense of the narrator and the story he tells. Such a defense involves a careful examination of Judges 19, as well as chapters 20 and 21 which recount events that arise in Israel as a result of the rape and dismemberment of the unnamed woman. In response to the charges that the narrator is guilty of *literary rape* and his text is *pornographic*, I hope to show that his narration has the effect of bringing us to the side of the victimized woman in compassion. While his story is seen by some to be a *justification of evil*, I shall argue that his story brings evil to light for the purpose of judgment. In fact, the final three chapters of the Book of Judges could be considered a study in the nature of Evil and the multifarious forms it takes in the context of human relations.

In a 1983 charcoal composition entitled *Gray Rape* (Fig. 1), the artist Sue Coe represents the brutal gang rape of a young woman that occurred in a bar in New Bedford, Massachusetts. The woman is spread out and pinned down on a pool table while a queue of partially clad men line up to take turns at sexually assaulting her. A number of patrons look on, some with casual interest, others with an expression of sexual excitement – the bartender continues to go about his business as he looks on. The pool table lamp swings wildly over the woman casting its light over her tortured body, her arms and her hands

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[9] Exum (1993: 181).

[10] Though it is possible that the narrator of this story was a woman, given the patriarchal social structure of the Ancient Near East it is more likely that the narrator was male; hence, my references to the narrator will assume a male, but they do not assume a male antagonistic to the interests of women.

[This page has been removed due to copyright restrictions. The image removed was **Figure 1: Sue Coe, *Gray Rape*, 1983, Galerie St. Etienne, New York**. It can be found in: Jerry Meyer, "Profane and Sacred: Religious Imagery and Prophetic Expression in Postmodern Art", *The Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 65, 1 (1997), pp. 19-46, see p. 25]

spread outward creating the image of a crucifix.

In Coe's representation of the event she intentionally borrows from a Grunewald painting known as the *Isenheim Crucified Christ.*[11] Like Grunewald's Christ the woman's arms and hands are strained and contorted with pain; but, while the hands of Grunewald's Christ are pinned by nails to a cross, the hands of the woman are pinned to a pool table by the hands of men. While the head of Grunewald's Christ falls pitifully to the side, his mouth open, his eyes closed in death, the head of the woman is pulled violently upright by her hair which is grasped in the hand of one of her tormentors. She is not dead; her eyes, with a seemingly internal focus, show that she is consciously experiencing every agonizing moment of her ordeal.

In this graphic visual composition we glimpse something of the horror described by the storyteller in the "literary composition" of Judges 19.[12] Though the representations are of different women in different times, their experience is shared. Why have Coe and the biblical storyteller chosen to represent such brutality? Through different media both artists are engaged in a social critique of their respective societies – societies that do violence to the vulnerable. We would never suggest that Coe's composition encourages "ways of looking at women that encourage objectification and violence." Why then has such a charge been levied against the narrator of the tale in Judges 19?

Coe's use of cruciform imagery, along with other visual cues (i.e. monochromatic coloration, phallic symbols, and facial expressions), suggests her condemnation of the event she represents. Though *Gray Rape* is sexually graphic, it is clearly not a piece of

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[11] I first viewed Coe's *Gray Rape* in a fascinating article by Jerry Meyer entitled, "Profane and Sacred: Religious Imagery and Prophetic Expression in Postmodern Art" (1997: 25). Meyer discusses the radical use of crucifix imagery in many recent pieces of art. He points out the close relationship between Coe's composition and that of Grunewald (24-26).

[12] While the narrative possesses a shocking realism, given its structural parallelism and use of the "Sodom" motif, I am inclined to think that the tale is a "literary construct" rather than the account of an actual event; it is not beyond the realm of possibility, however, for such an event to have occurred. The Book of Hosea makes reference to sin and corruption in "the days of Gibeah" in 9:9 and 10:9, but it is impossible to know whether the memory in Hosea is of an event or of a text.

pornography designed to stimulate sexual excitement on the part of the viewing audience. Like Coe, the author of Judges 19 uses a number of means to express his condemnation of what takes place in the story he narrates. Shimon Bar-Efrat, in his study of narrative art in the Bible, observes that unlike prophetic literature in which the author's views are expressed more directly (if not passionately), the views of the author(s) of biblical narrative are expressed "in an oblique and unobtrusive way." Typical of biblical narrative the author of Judges 19 adopts a "narrative voice" – the voice of the *narrator* – that reports events in a matter-of-fact, dispassionate manner. Furthermore, this "narrative voice" makes few, if any, evaluative comments as the tale unfolds. One cannot assume, however, that the matter-of-fact, somewhat reticent tone of the *narrator* is indicative of indifference on the part of the *author*.[13] Bar-Efrat makes this comment:

> The author's attitudes and views are not necessarily expressed separately from the facts of the narrative . . . but are usually intertwined with them, being manifested in the way the narrative unfolds. The narrative affects the reader through the combination of 'what' and 'how', namely, what is related and how this is done.[14]

To discern the author/narrator's attitude toward the characters and events represented in Judges 19 one must therefore engage in a literary analysis of the text and explore the

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[13] It is common in literary analysis to distinguish between the author and the narrator. The author adopts a "narrative voice", that of the narrator, to suit his or her purposes. When exploring the rhetorical strategies of a narrative such as Judges 19, the boundary between the author and narrator becomes blurred. It is the author who employs certain rhetorical strategies in his presentation of characters and events, but the presentation is accomplished through the medium of the "narrative voice", that of the narrator. Though the narrative voice may be dispassionate, *the way* in which the tale is told reveals the sympathies of the author/narrator. News reporters of today operate in a similar manner, adopting a seemingly dispassionate tone in their news accounts; but the details they choose to share with their audience, and the way in which they present these details reflects their own emotional and ideological attitude toward their subject.

[14] Bar-Efrat (1989: 16).

strategies of representation. One must observe the internal dynamics of the story itself: how the author/narrator manipulates the elements of time and space; how he presents the characters involved in the drama of the narrative; and how he structures the plot or sequence of events to create a certain effect upon his reader.[15] Given the nature of biblical literature, one must also consider how the story relates to the narrative material immediately surrounding it; how it interacts with the Book of Judges as a whole; and how it is connected to the larger biblical story of the Hebrew people and YHWH.

As one explores the narrative strategies employed in Judges 19, one becomes aware of how important the reader is to the construction of meaning. The text calls upon the reader to make connections, draw parallels, and to see contrasts both within the literary unit itself, and between it and other literary units in the biblical corpus. The reader is also challenged to explore the possibilities opened up by multivalent words, ambiguities, and silences in the text (sometimes exploring these possibilities can be painful, as one can imagine the worst). The success with which one can accomplish these interpretive tasks contributes significantly to the depth of one's understanding of the story and its themes.

In the process of analyzing the story of the Levite and his concubine one develops a profound sense of appreciation for the terrible beauty of this text and the artistry of the one who crafted it. I hope to demonstrate that the silence of the unnamed woman, violated and broken, speaks the storyteller's own anguish for the loss of a vision: the loss of a vision of wholeness and well being for his people – the sons *and the daughters* of Israel.

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[15] In *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative* (1985) Sternberg studies "The Story of David and Bathsheba" (II Samuel 11). He observes that the narrator of this tale adopts an "objective posture as ironist"(p. 197). Though the narrator passes no overt judgment on the figure of David, it is implied through the ironic presentation of events and dialogue. Sternberg describes the means by which the author/narrator establishes an "ironic framework" for the tale: "The suppression of essentials, the narrator's pseudo-objectivity, and the tone rendering the horror as if it were an everyday matter: all these create an extreme ironic discordance between the tale's mode of presentation and the action itself, as reconstructed and evaluated by the reader"(p. 191). The narrator of Judges 19 presents his tale in similar fashion.

CHAPTER I: THE WEB OF DESIGN[16]

In *The Book of God*, Gabriel Josipovici cautions students of biblical literature not to treat literary units in the Bible in isolation. He makes an important observation in his discussion of the story of Joseph:

> . . . Joseph's story is, after all, only an episode in Jacob's story . . . And even Jacob's story, of course, is only an episode in the larger story of Israel, which begins in (Genesis) chapter 11 and does not have an end; and that . . . is itself only an episode in the larger history of the world, which begins in (Genesis) chapter 1. To take the episodes in the Bible as individual units and talk about 'the story of Joseph' or 'the story of David's succession' is already to make certain assumptions about the kind of book this is – an anthology – which are totally unwarranted. These assumptions . . . are to be found . . . in the critic who unthinkingly brings to this book notions of literary form, such as drama and short story, which really have no place here.[17]

Within the scope of the Bible as a whole "the story of the Levite and his concubine" finds its roots in the Garden of Eden, an idyllic place where the creator God brings man and woman together into relationship. It is also rooted in the story of Cain and Abel, a story that culminates in murder when one brother rises up against the other to shed blood on the land. When Adam and Eve eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil dissonance enters the created order. Curiously, though humans become party to "the knowledge of good and evil", they prove themselves unable to *discern* good from evil. Even as God endeavors to reestablish "good" order in the world by covenanting with the community of Israel, the people of Israel, like Adam and Eve before them, fail to accommodate their will to the will of the covenanting God.

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[16] A turn of phrase borrowed from Robert Alter's "Sodom as Nexus: The Web of Design in Biblical Narrative" (1994: 28-42).

[17] Josipovici (1988: 78).

The Book of Judges follows the "trials" of the people of Israel as they attempt to secure their presence in a land promised them by God – the land of Canaan. But, as one story unfolds after another in the Book of Judges, we repeatedly hear the refrain, "*the children of Israel did what was evil in the eyes of the LORD*"(ויעשו בני ישראל את הרע בעיני יהוה, 2:11; 3:7, 12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1, MT).[18] This refrain is part of a recurring rhythm or pattern that characterizes the book, a cyclical pattern in which 1) the people of Israel do "*what is evil in the eyes of the LORD*", 2) the LORD is angered and gives them into the hands of their enemies, 3) the people cry to the LORD and he is moved to pity, and 4) the LORD raises up a deliverer to save them from oppression. Upon the people's deliverance (i.e. when they overcome their oppressors) it is said that the land has rest. But this rest is never continuous. *Again* the people of Israel do "*what is evil in the eyes of the LORD*", and the cycle repeats itself.[19]

Though cyclical, the pattern that underlies the Book of Judges is not a consistent or stable one. A number of scholars have observed that the paradigmatic scheme established near the outset of the book with the story of the deliverer, Othniel (3:7-11), is a scheme that progressively deteriorates.[20] The Gideon narrative (6:11-8:35), which lies at the heart of the book, initiates a downward spiral into both moral and social chaos. With each succeeding narrative unit not only is Israel's deliverance less complete, but the tribes of Israel also begin to wage war upon each other rather than upon "the nations". Chaos at the level of the nation is symptomatic of moral and religious confusion at the

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[18] While the translation of Judges 19 is my own based upon the Masoretic Text (MT), all other biblical references, except where noted, are drawn from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) (1989).

[19] Webb (1987: 33) points to "the dense network of interlocking motifs which unify the narrative at a deeper level than the repeating surface pattern". Josipovici makes the additional observation that another unifying feature of Judges is its tendency to treat motifs and episodes from elsewhere in the Bible parodically or satirically. He argues further that, in so doing, the Book of Judges "operates under the sign of irony" (1988: 118). Lillian Klein concentrates on the play of irony in Judges in *The Triumph of Irony in the Book of Judges* (1989).

[20] Among others see Lilley (1967: 97-99); Klein (1989: 19-20); Exum (1990: 411-412); Fewell and Gunn (1993b: 120).

individual level: Gideon fashions an idolatrous ephod with enemy gold to which "*all Israel prostituted themselves*"(8:27); Abimelech attempts to establish himself as king (Judg 9); Jephthah makes a human sacrifice of his only daughter (Judg 11); and Samson, a man given to physical and sexual passions, fails to conduct himself as a Nazirite, as one consecrated to God (Judg 13-16). Exum, in her article, "The Centre Cannot Hold", observes: "the political and moral instability depicted in Judges is reflected in the textual instability. The framework deconstructs itself so to speak, and the cycle of apostasy and deliverance becomes increasingly murky."[21]

Judges is also characterized by repeated shifts in focus from tribal events to unique domestic situations. Like a camera that moves back and forth from a panoramic perspective to a detail study, the biblical storyteller presents us with accounts of tribal conquest interspersed with tales of husbands and wives, fathers and daughters, mothers and sons, as well as tales about Israelite kinsmen and their interactions with one another. This alternating focus is initiated at the very outset of the book: an account of the tribe of Judah's conquests in the land of Canaan (1:4-10) is followed by the private story of the Judahite, Caleb, his daughter Achsah, and his brother, the conqueror Othniel (1:11-15). In other words, the collective, public experience of the people of Israel alternates with individual, private experience. But regardless of the focus, *death*, shocking and massive death, is everywhere in Judges – both in the public and the private domain![22]

The book concludes with a series of stories contained in chapters 17-21 that share this pattern of shifting focus. Chapter 17 concerns the domestic circumstances of a man of Ephraim named Micah who fashions himself a "graven image" from stolen silver. He later secures a nameless Levite from Bethlehem to be priest in his private shrine. As the narrative progresses, Micah's private history becomes intertwined with tribal history, that of the tribe of Dan as it attempts to secure a territory of its own (chapter 18). The narrative complex comprised of chapters 17 and 18 is followed by another complex that

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[21] Exum (1990a: 412). See also Globe (1990).

[22] Bal (1988: 1) sees the Book of Judges as one of the "monuments of antiquity that celebrate death".

is similarly structured – chapters 19 through 21. This second concluding complex contains the story of the Levite and his concubine (chapter 19), which is followed first by an account of Israel rising up in retribution against the tribe of Benjamin (chapter 20), and in turn by the measures taken by Israel to secure wives for the tribe they have just decimated (chapter 21).

While these two concluding narrative units (chapters 17-18 & chapters 19-21) share the shifting focus of the book as a whole, the fourfold plot schema that structures the rest of the book is no longer present: the anticipated phrase, "*the children of Israel (again) did what was evil in the eyes of the LORD*" does not appear; Israel is not given into the hands of foreign enemies; no judges are raised up by the LORD to deliver Israel from her oppressors; and the presence of God is minimal in the narratives, at times seemingly absent.

The oddity of this unit has led many scholars to conclude that it is an appendix added to the main body of the text by a later redactor/author.[23] Though this may well be the case, many scholars have also recognized that the "so-called" appendix is linked to what precedes it both thematically and by means of interlocking motifs. Danna Nolan Fewell and David Gunn describe these connections:

> Like the plot, the very nation is shattered. The story that began with God telling Judah to go first against the Canaanites to take possession of the promised land (Judg. 1:1-3) ends ironically with God, asked only as an afterthought, telling Judah to go first to fight Benjamin – and be defeated (Judg. 20:18-21)! Holy war against Canaanites gives way to the slaughter of Laish, 'a people quiet and unsuspecting' (Judg. 18:27-31); tribal cooperation to possess the promised land (Judg. 1:1-3) turns to tribal alliance to engage in civil war and the mass rape of Israelite women by

[23] Webb (1987: esp. 13-40) and O'Brien (1994) offer excellent summaries of the history of redaction criticism of Judges to date. Both observe a shift in recent scholarship away from diachronic analyses of the text toward synchronic theological and literary analyses. Webb adopts the latter approach in his treatment of Judges.

> Israelite men (Judges 20). Achsah's arrival on an ass to ask for a life-giving gift from her father (Judg. 1:11-15) is cruelly parodied in the story of the Levite's woman who is raped to death (perhaps), dumped on an ass and taken home to be divided limb by limb and sent out as a message for war. The story that begins with divine concern about false gods (Judges 2) ends with Micah resolved that his security is ensured because he has graven and molten images (made from stolen silver and 'consecrated' to YHWH!), a private shrine, and his son as a priest . . . When read with an eye to the ironies of these actions and attitudes, the 'supplement' (appendix) becomes more like a 'coda' or 'epilogue', intimately connected with the preceding plot yet distinct from it.[24]

These, and other connections that exist between the final section and the rest of the text, have profound bearing on how we come to understand the final section. The echoes encourage the reader to adopt a retrospective stance and to interpret the events in chapters 17-21 in light of all that precedes them.

Like Fewell and Gunn, Barry Webb also refers to the final section of the Book of Judges as a "coda".[25] Using a musical analogy he correlates the book to a piece of classical music. Accordingly, the book is initiated by an *Overture* (chapters 1:1-3:6) which introduces the political and theological themes of the book as well as the paradigmatic scheme noted above; this is followed by a central section composed of a *Theme and Variations* (chapters 3:7-16:31), with the story of Othniel serving as the basic theme and the accounts of other judges as variations upon it; and the book is concluded with a *Coda* (chapters 17:1-21:25) which breaks the pattern of the central section but echoes it in theme and motif. Webb's musical analogy is an apt one because classical music, like the Book of Judges, is characterized both by its structure and by its intricate development and rearticulation of themes and motifs.

One distinctive feature of the coda section that serves to distinguish it from the rest of

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[24] Fewell and Gunn (1993b: 120).

[25] Webb (1987). See also Klein (1989: 15); and Fokkelman (1992: 43).

the text is its use of the line, "*In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes.*"[26] This line appears in full near the beginning of the coda with the story of Micah and the Levite (17:6), and again at the conclusion of the coda after the abduction of the daughters of Shiloh (21:25). Situated in this way the line serves two structural purposes: it brackets the coda section creating a discrete unit, and it dramatically concludes the Book of Judges as a whole. The line reappears in abbreviated form with the words, "*In those days (when) there was no king in Israel*," once at the beginning of chapter 18:1 with the story of the Danites, and again at the beginning of chapter 19:1 with the story of the Levite and his concubine. The strategic repetition of these lines naturally suggests a strong link between the two narratives complexes that make up the coda.

The two concluding narrative complexes are in fact companion pieces. Each complex involves movement across the land – the movement of a nameless Levite. In the first instance a Levite leaves the town of Bethlehem in Judah and travels north to the hill country of Ephraim to find a dwelling place; in the second the opposite occurs – a Levite leaves his home in the hill country of Ephraim and goes to Bethlehem in order to seek out his estranged concubine. While the first narrative focuses on the "public office" of a Levite as priest, the second directs our attention to a Levite's private affairs. Both complexes explore the implications of "whoring", or *zanah* (זָנָה): the first explores the "behavior" figuratively by representing Israel "whoring" after idols; the second treats the theme literally by characterizing the concubine as one who "whored" against her husband (19:2 MT)[27]. Both units also examine the reception given a travelling Levite in the land

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[26] The NRSV translates the line: *In those days there was no king in Israel; all the people did what was right in their own eyes*. I have opted here for a more "traditional/patriarchal" rendering of the phrase because of its echo-relationship with Judges 19:24 where the Hebrew can be translated as: *Look, here is my daughter, a virgin, and his concubine . . . do to them what is good in your eyes*. The NRSV translates 19:24 as: *do whatever you want to them*. The NRSV translation loses the subtle links created by the motif "in his own eyes/in your own eyes" that serve to unify the coda. See also note 178.

[27] Though the NRSV notes the MT rendering of the verse, it adopts the Septuagint rendering and translates the verse as, "But his concubine became angry with him". The MT rendering of the verse,

of Israel and the degree to which it is hospitable or inhospitable. Finally, the Danite conquest of the "quiet and unsuspecting" city of Laish (18:27) in the first narrative complex is echoed in the second, first by the rape of the Levite's concubine (19:25) and later by the abduction/rape of the virgin daughters of Jabesh-gilead and Shiloh (21:12, 23).[28]

In both of these narrative units Evil is perpetrated by Israelites. Like a stone dropped into a pool of water that initiates a succession of rings of ever increasing size, an initial act of "evil" in each unit is subject to amplification. In chapters 17-18 theft by one man expands into theft by many: Micah fashions a graven image from stolen silver and this in turn is absconded with by the tribe of Dan. Similarly, in chapters 19-21, the violence experienced by a nameless Israelite couple – especially the woman – initiates a succession of violent acts involving the entire nation, including countless women. The

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however, links the narrative at the semantic level to a central theme of the Book of Judges, i.e. Israel's apostasy or "whoring" after the gods of the other nations.

[28] Amit, in *The Book of Judges: The Art of Editing* (1999), employs the tools of redaction criticism in an attempt to reconstruct the "guiding editorial line" that governs the book. She comes to the following conclusion: "Chapters 17-18 alone conclude the editorial guideline (in the book as a whole) related to the problem of leadership, and are the ones which stress the regnant anarchy and the need for a king. Chapters 19-21 were added by a later editor as further data, which seemingly continue and complete the description of anarchy and suit the end of the book, but in practice *express a far different polemical purpose.* One might add that the fact that most scholars tend to see these two sections as stories complementing one another by stressing the need for a king indicates the sophistication of the methods used by the appending redactor"(p. 316). Amit outlines similarities between the two units but sees the links as artificial. She claims that Part I (chapter 17-18) and Part II (chapters 19-21) do not share the same thematic concerns. Part I, she argues, portrays the period of Judges as a negative period and promotes the monarchy as a solution to the problem of leadership in Israel. Part II, she claims, expresses 1) an anti-Benjaminite polemic designed to cast a shadow on the first king, Saul, and 2) an affirmation of the tribal institution "capable of being organized and organizing the people as one man, of uprooting the evil from Israel, and of controlling the cultic and moral situation"(p. 348). I am not in agreement with Amit's assessment of the final chapters of Judges. A fuller discussion of Amit's conclusions will follow in Chapter 5.

crime against the couple is followed first by an attack upon the whole tribe of Benjamin, then by an attack upon the city of Jabesh-gilead, and then by the abduction/rape of the virgin daughters of Jabesh-gilead and Shiloh.

In the coda the narrator's use of the phrase, "*every man did what was right in his own eyes,*" brings the events he recounts under censure.[29] This distinctive phrase picks up on a pivotal motif used repeatedly in the Book of Judges. As noted above, time and again the book employs the line, "*The children of Israel did what was evil in the eyes of the LORD.*" When we juxtapose this line with the one used in the coda we see that they are antithetically related to one another:

> *The children of Israel did what was evil in the eyes of the LORD*
> ויעשׂו בני ישׂראל את הרע בעיני יהוה
> *Every man did what was right in his own eyes*
> איש הישׁר בעיניו יעשׂה

The coda adopts the motif of "seeing" but radically shifts the point of view from that of God to that of human beings – to *every man.* What God sees as "evil" is contrasted with what every man sees as "right". By emphasizing the words "*in his own eyes*" the writer vests personal responsibility for action in the subject – every man. Furthermore, the words "Israel" and "every man" stand in relation to each other. "Every man" is but a microcosm of the whole, the whole people of Israel.[30] The generic evil attributed to the nation as a whole is particularized in the coda – we see it acted out by individuals and tribal groupings in a myriad of forms.

The narrator of the coda *presents* this evil to the reader in a remarkably cinematographic manner. He gives substance to the refrain, "*The children of Israel did what was*

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[29] Contra Boling (1969: 293) who argues that, "the (concluding) statement has a positive thrust after the ingenious solution of problems in the final scenes."

[30] This "small" correlation between the Book of Judges as a whole and the coda gives us some appreciation of just how intricately interwoven its component parts are. See also, Webb (1987: 200).

evil in the eyes of the LORD". The coda is a study in the nature of evil and human sinfulness. It explores *modes* or degrees of evil: evil done with the intention to do good; evil done without the intention to do wrong; conscious, intentional evil: even cold-blooded evil; and the coda explores the perpetration of this "evil" by God's chosen people in the Promised Land.[31]

When we "observe" the repeated raping of the nameless woman of Judges 19 we are confronted with cold-blooded evil. The storyteller brings us to this moment – "the heart of the heart of darkness" – by slowly sharing with us a day by day, then an hour by hour account of a journey taken by a man and a woman bound and unbound by marriage. The very length of the narrative (chapter 19) is indicative of its importance to the storyteller and his purposes. Jan Fokkelman, in his otherwise careful analysis of the text, makes the following assertion:

> After all, and without any underestimation of the woman's experience, the crime of chap. 19 is *merely an incident*. But it becomes the spark in a powder keg: it serves as the exposition to, and the opportunity for, the emotional chaos and civil war of chaps. 20-21. *The national level of violence and confusion there and the resulting problem of the right form of government are really the level on which the narrator*

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[31] Ron Rosenbaum explores both the notion and the enactment of "evil" in contemporary American society in his article "Staring into the Heart of the Heart of Darkness" (1995: 36-44+). He distinguishes between categories of evil using the following analogy: " It might help to think of the categories of evil as somewhat akin to the City of Los Angeles. In the sense that in both cases the name is a general term for a number of very different and distinct subdivisions . . . there are evil deeds committed with intention to do good, and evil deeds done without the intention to commit evil. Finally, we come to the inner sanctum of the suburbs of evil, to the most elusive and exclusive category of evil, a category some philosophers still refuse to concede exists, although most of us know it when we see it. The heart of the heart of darkness, the Beverly Hills of evil: conscious, intentional evil, or as the philosophical literature prefers to call it, wickedness. Some subdivide wickedness itself even further until we arrive at the innermost enclosure. There behind the iron spiked gates is the very Bel Air of evil: malignant wickedness, coldblooded evil for evil's sake" (p.43).

wants to work, as the coda to his book.[32]

In making this assertion Fokkelman does not recognize the importance of the pattern observed above in which domestic events alternate with national events. The tale of the Levite and his concubine is not presented as a "mere incident" in the ebb and flow of larger tribal events. In structuring the Book of Judges the biblical storyteller pays close attention to both levels of social intercourse, the domestic and the national, *insisting on the importance of both in defining the character of the people of Israel*. The storyteller's representations of the micro-politics of everyday life are indicative of larger social and political realities. Fokkelman's remarks display a tendency shared by many biblical scholars, a tendency rightly criticized by Mieke Bal in her book *Death and Dissymmetry*, "to narrow history down to a narrative of war and political leadership".[33] While "history" in Judges *is* told from the top down, it is also told from the bottom up – particularly so in Judges 19. The story of a nameless Levite and his equally nameless concubine becomes emblematic of a particularly notorious period in Israel's social history. As a result, in the historical imagination of the people of Israel, the whole period of the Judges is invoked by reference to "*the days of Gibeah*" (Hosea 9:9 & 10:9). What is more, the biblical storyteller's attention to the private sphere allows the reader to appreciate how the throes of history are bodily experienced at an individual level, a level to which we can relate all the more intimately.

Having examined how "the story of the Levite and his concubine" is structurally and thematically linked to the Book of Judges as a whole, we can now turn to examine the design of the tale itself. The disturbing effect of this story is accomplished in large part by its structure. The tale is circular in construction: beginning in the hill country of Ephraim, the story traces the movements of a Levite and his concubine first to the city of Bethlehem, then to the city of Gibeah, and then back to the hill country of Ephraim. But

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[32] Fokkelman (1992: 43) (emphasis mine).

[33] Bal (1988: 13).

the account of this journey is fractured into two parts that stand in a relationship of *antithetical symmetry* to one another. Both parts explore the theme of hospitality in the land of Israel. The first part, however, is marked by an excess of pleasure, the second, by an excess of pain. In the first, the pleasure belongs to a man, in the second, the pain to a woman. These two parts pivot around a discussion that occurs between the Levite and his servant (vs. 11-12) which compares the prospect of hospitality in a foreign city, Jebus, with that of a city belonging to the children of Israel, Gibeah. This discussion proves to have ironic import, for as the tale progresses the Levite's decision to opt for the latter has disastrous consequences.

Fokkelman identifies a system of symmetrical relationships in his analysis of the structure of Judges 19. He proposes the following formula:

A	B	C	D	-	X	-	D	C	B	A
v.1-2	3-4	5-7	8-10		11-14		15-21	22-26	27-28	29-30
intro	journey	stay	stay		journey		stay	stay	journey	appeal

Fokkelman's analysis[34] is helpful, but his scheme fails to reflect two fundamental aspects of the tale: the antithetical nature of the relationship between Part I and Part II, and the crucial significance of the account of the dismemberment of the concubine – this event is too easily absorbed into the last section, section A. I would propose a refinement to Fokkelman's scheme in the following formula:

A a B C D - X - D' C' B' a' A'

The apostrophes appended to the elements in Part II indicate the antithetical relationship

[34] Fokkelman (1992: 41) initially proposes a series ABCDEFGHI with the verse breakdown outlined here, but later (p. 44), in order to emphasize the pivotal function of element X, he rewrites the series as ABCD-X-DCBA. I have chosen to work with the latter construction because it represents the pattern of symmetry more effectively.

they bear to their counterparts in Part I; and elements a/a' reflect the parallel relationship between verse 2 at the outset of the story in which we read, "*his concubine played the harlot against him,*" and verse 29 near the conclusion of the tale in which we read, "*he took the knife and seized his concubine and divided her together with her bones, into twelve pieces, and he sent her throughout the territory of Israel.*" In the woman's initial act of whoring her body is shared, accessible to many and the site of insemination by many; similarly, in her dismemberment and dispersal her body is scattered throughout the nation, her bleeding members serving as the medium by which a "call to war" is disseminated.[35]

In *Texts of Terror*, Trible provides a breakdown of the narrative structure of Judges 19 similar to that of Fokkelman.[36] In her analysis she notes the importance of location in the design of the narrative: while the introduction and conclusion are set in the hill country of Ephraim, Part I (Trible's Scene I) is set in Bethlehem of Judah, while Part II (Scene II) is set in Gibeah of Benjamin. The discussion interlude that stands between the two parts, Fokkelman's element X, places the travellers in an unstable location within the greater geography of Israel, in a place where "foreign" influence still prevails. The contrast in locations is a further manifestation of the antithetical system of relations that

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[35] Even this formula is inadequate because it suggests closure to the tale. As observed earlier, the violence of Judges 19 spills over into the narratives that succeed it; the story of one couple becomes the story of the whole people of Israel. Perhaps a better formulation would be one that indicates continuation, i.e. A a B C D - X – D' C' B' a' A' >.

[36] Trible (1984: 65) draws on the language of the dramatic arts (which is not unwarranted given the remarkably cinematographic quality of the narrative) to describe the design of the text: "an introduction (19:1-2) and a conclusion (19:29-30) surround two scenes (19:3-10 and 19:15b-28), which are separated by an interlude (19:11-15a)." She further divides the two main *scenes* into a number of *episodes.*

Levy explores the theatrical qualities of Judges 19-21 in *The Bible as Theatre* (2000; esp. pp. 41-52). He asserts that a theatrical reading of this text reveals a "pro-feminist attitude" on the part of the "biblical playwright" whose "stage-directions" "display a profoundly moral attitude toward the rape, killing and dismembering of the concubine, and the later abuse of many other women" (p. 9).

underlies the narrative design. What is more, the text's attention to location foregrounds the central importance of Israel's sacred geography to the author's purposes. We will see that the shifting setting in this narrative is more than backdrop; it assumes a determinative function in the development of the story line.

Parallelism, both synonymous and antithetical, is commonly and artfully exploited in Hebrew poetry. In Judges 19 we see that similar principles are applied to the construction of Hebrew narrative. The text has a balanced structure, but this sense of balance is undermined by the system of antithetical relationships. Tension is created between the two parts of the tale, with the excesses of one intensifying our awareness of the excesses of the other. But despite sharp contrasts in the tale, it is not a black and white tale; it is full of gray areas, full of ambiguities that challenge both our perception and our judgment.

In order to observe the play of contrast and explore the gray areas of this complex narrative, I shall now turn to examine the story as it unfolds. Close scrutiny of the text will also reveal a myriad of relationships that bind this tale to the larger story of the people of Israel. It is through these connections that the rape and dismemberment of a concubine becomes more than the isolated experience of a nameless woman. Her personal experience becomes an event of import within the sacred history of Israel.

CHAPTER II: EXPOSITION – MINUTIA OF IMPORT

Robert Alter, in his influential book, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, undertakes the task of following "the sustained operation of narrative art"[37] in a number of biblical stories. Not only does such an approach allow one to appreciate the complex artistry of a given biblical text, it also permits one to attend to nuances of the text which act as indicators of the storyteller's attitude toward the subject of his tale. Though I will not do a verse by verse analysis of Judges 19, my reading of the text will be a close reading, a reading that follows the tale as it unfolds and attends to, among other things, the narrator's choice of words, his play with space and time, the subtleties of his characterizations, and his rearticulation of themes and motifs that act as "remembrances of things past" and premonitions of things to come.

The tale begins with a standard biblical exposition that establishes the time and location of the story and introduces us to two of its principal characters:

> 1. *And it happened that in those days when there was no king in Israel, there was a man, a Levite sojourning in the hill country of Ephraim; and he took to himself a woman, a concubine from Bethlehem of Judah.*

The opening phrase, "*And it happened that in those days*", suggests an antecedent; it suggests that the story is a continuation of a preceding narrative. The time designation, "*in those days when there was no king in Israel*", locates the events at some distance from the narrator and his audience in the pre-monarchic period. It is a generalized temporal marker inclusive of an entire period.

It is difficult to locate the tale within the chronological order that marks the core of the Book of Judges. Situated as it is at the conclusion of the book leads one to believe

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[37] Alter (1981: 3).

that the events took place at the end of the period of the Judges; but reference to the priest, Phinehas son of Eleazar, son of Aaron in 20:28 locates the story of the Levite and his concubine and the events that follow their "misadventure" much earlier in the period. Numbers 31:6 places Phinehas son of Eleazar within the lifetime of Moses; but at the conclusion of the Samson narratives, which directly precede the coda, a number of generations have passed since Israel entered the land of Canaan.[38] Clearly placement of the coda section within the historical chronology of Judges is problematic.[39]

Exum observes two movements in time at work in the Book of Judges: time governed by a cyclical pattern in the stories of the judges, and a more linear, kingless time in the coda.[40] In temporal terms, it is as though the latter is overlaid on the former. It appears that our story and the entire coda are located where they are in the corpus according to the dictates of a literary chronology rather than a historical one. An account of the general mayhem and horror of the period is situated at this juncture in the ongoing biblical storyline in anticipation of I Samuel. The downward spiral of chaos that so characterizes the period of judges, and the evil that pervades "*those days*", creates a "lack" in the continuing story line – a lack that demands a remedy. I Samuel seemingly provides such a remedy in its account of the transition to a monarchy.[41]

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[38] The chronological placement of Judges 19 is further complicated by its literary proximity to Judges 18 in which the Levite is referred to as Jonathan son of Gershom, son of Moses (18:30). This designation is consistent with the generations listed in Judges 20:28, but it too is at odds with the chronology set in Numbers 31:6.

[39] Bal (1988) criticizes the propensity of biblical scholars to impose coherence on the Book of Judges by establishing a historical/political chronology for the text "that may be totally alien" to it. She argues that this type of "historiography" imposes "a coherence built out of male preoccupations"(p. 17). In contradistinction she coins the term "hystoriography" to describe Judges, a genre that does not inscribe coherence but "inscribes the chaotic 'fullness of life' that we have learned to eliminate from historiography"(p. 17). She reads with an eye to "countercoherence". Rather than reading for the coherence of politics in the text, she attends to what is left out by such a reading – in particular the stories of women – and to the motivations that underlie such repression (see pp. 12-17).

[40] Exum (1990a: 429).

[41] In his commentary on I Samuel, Jobling (1998: 32) observes that the established divisions of "the

The narrator's notation that the events took place "*when there was no king in Israel*" signals that he is doing more than simply recounting the events of a period; he is providing *a commentary* on a particular social order and a particular form of leadership – or lack thereof. With these few words the narrator transforms his story into a critical tool.

The opening words are, however, double-edged. To say "*there was no king in Israel*" suggests more than the absence of a worldly monarch, it suggests the absence of the "rule of the LORD". In Judges 8:23 Gideon refuses the request of the Israelites to become their king by saying, "*I will not rule over you, and my son will not rule over you; the LORD will rule over you.*" This statement echoes the theocratic ideology that is so strongly articulated in the Book of Deuteronomy. According to this ideology YHWH is the God of gods, and King of kings whose domain is the universe (Deut 10:14). Of all the peoples of the earth YHWH chooses Israel to be his own, to be the people through whom His way and His rule are to be revealed. To Israel he *gives* the land of Canaan. It is not won by them through their own military might, it is a land grant given them by the LORD, a gift given in remembrance of YHWH's promise to Abraham (Deut 9:4-6; cp. Judges 7). Within this ideological construction, as Norman Habel observes, "YHWH is identified as the owner and ruler over the land in which Israel is to live under the polity of *torah* outlined in Deuteronomy".[42] By marking the time in Judges 19 as a time when "*there*

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canonical books exercise a power over our reading, authorizing some ways of reading over others." He contends that alternative divisions can influence our understanding of particular texts. To emphasize his point he argues that the theological summary passages found at Judges 2:11-23, I Samuel 12, and II Samuel 7, define an alternative set of "books". He names the first "The Extended Book of Judges" and includes within it Judges 2:11– I Samuel 12; the second he names "The Book of the Everlasting Covenant" and includes within it I Samuel 13 – II Samuel 7 (pp. 28-29). He sees I Samuel 1-7 as a continuation of the judge cycles and argues that the events of I Samuel 1-7 only make sense if they are read continuously with the Book of Judges; that God's wrath and the people's corporate repentance are understandable only in relation to events recounted in the Book of Judges and to the pattern explicitly set out in Judges 2:11-23. He suggests that when I Samuel is read in isolation from the previously established pattern in Judges, God's wrath presents as extreme and undeserved.

[42]Habel (1995: 37).

was no king in Israel", does the narrator mean to imply that the LORD has abandoned Israel? Is he possibly suggesting that the LORD is somehow deficient in His leadership? Habel notes that, "YHWH's identity and authority as ruler are linked to YHWH's capacity to conquer the land allocated to Israel."[43] In Judges 19:10-12 we learn that the very centre of Israel's sacred geography, "Jebus (which is Jerusalem)", is still unsecured. Does this mean that YHWH is unable to affect his purposes – that He is impotent? Or perhaps the narrator means to suggest that Israel is so removed from the "way of the LORD" that His rule no longer holds sway in the land? Given the double-edged ambiguity of the "no king" clause, multiple possibilities must be entertained in our minds as we seek to understand the text.

While we have already encountered the phrase "*in those days there was no king in Israel*", we have also previously encountered a travelling Levite. Yairah Amit, in *The Book of Judges: the Art of Editing*, makes these remarks concerning the two Levites in the concluding narrative units:

> In both sections a member of the tribe of Levi appears. However, whereas in the story of the Danites the Levite is an inseparable part of a plot concerned with a shrine and its personnel, in that of the concubine *the fact that the concubine's husband belongs to the tribe of Levi is irrelevant.* The shocking effect of what took place does not depend upon the man's origin, and this characterization adds nothing in particular. Thus, the attribution of a Levitic genealogy to the man may perhaps be seen as an attempt to enrich the analogic framework, which will later serve to draw a certain kind of resemblance between the two adjacent incidents.[44]

In other words, Amit considers the designation of the man as "a Levite" in Judges 19 to be a bit of artifice on the part of the author to link the two parts of the coda. Contrary to

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[43] Habel (1995: 38).

[44] Amit (1999: 353) (emphasis mine). See also Soggin (1981: 284).

Amit, I would argue that the man's Levitic genealogy is of fundamental importance to the purpose of the narrative and the way in which it unfolds.

Although the Levite of our story is nameless, his designation as "a Levite" sets up certain expectations in the mind of the reader. In a study of anonymity in the Bible, Adele Reinhartz makes the following observation:

> . . . the principal effect of the absence of a proper name is to focus the reader's attention on the role designations that flood into the gap that anonymity denotes. Focus on role designations, in turn, allows us to construct identity in the locus between the role designation and the character's narrative portrayal. In doing so we compare the stereotypical behaviors associated with the role in biblical narrative and the particular ways in which the unnamed character fulfills or does not fulfill the role, or we look at the degree to which he or she stretches its limits or calls its very contours into question.[45]

In *The Land is Mine*, Habel describes the role of Levites in pre-monarchic Israelite society. With the entry of Israel into the Promised Land the Levites assume Moses' responsibility for preserving the rule of *Torah*:

> The threefold function of the Levites is specified as carrying the ark, standing before YHWH to minister, and blessing in YHWH's name (Deut. 10:8). The Levites thereby have access to God's presence and serve as guardians of the ark or, more specifically, the ten words of God that are deposited in the ark and that epitomize the constitutional law for the land.[46]

While the Levites serve an important cultic function in pre-monarchic Israel, they are also the guardians of the *Torah* and the arbiters of justice in Israel. In their very persons they

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[45] Reinhartz (1998: 188).

[46] Habel (1995: 49).

are associated with the presence of God and His law – they are God's representatives in the land. In this capacity, Habel argues, the Levites are the "true rulers of an envisaged theocracy for the land."[47]

As noted earlier, Judges 17-18 presents a Levite in the performance of his "public office" as a priest, first in the private shrine of Micah and later in the tribal shrine of the Danites. The presentation of the Levite's behavior in these chapters is not favourable, however, for he contravenes the law prohibiting idolatry by presiding over a sanctuary dedicated to graven images. When he opportunistically betrays the generosity of Micah and opts for a better deal with the Danites, he multiplies his crime against God by leading an entire tribe into idolatry (cp. Judg 8:27).

The literary proximity of *our* tale to Judges 17-18, and the echoes that exist between the two narrative units, lead the reader to presume that the nameless Levite of Judges 19 is also trained to perform cultic duties and serve as a priest. But, in Judges 19 the Levite's participation in cultic activity is suggested only when he refers to "*the house of the LORD*" (ואת בית יהוה אני הלך, v. 18 [MT]) in response to the queries made by the old Ephraimite as to his destination.[48] In contradistinction to Judges 17-18 the focus in Judges 19 is not on the "public office" of a Levite, but on a Levite's "private affairs".[49] While in Judges 17-18 the reader is called upon to measure the integrity with which a Levite fulfills his role as a priest, in Judges 19 we must assess the integrity with which a Levite, *constrained by the dictates of his religious position,* fulfills his role as both a husband/ master and a guest/servant in Israelite society.[50]

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[47] Habel (1995: 50)

[48] The NRSV adopts the Septuagint, "*I am going to my home*."

[49] See also Reinhartz (1998: 79-81).

[50] It is of some significance that these tales concerning Levites find their placement at this particular juncture in the ongoing story of Israel. In the books that follow Judges, I and II Samuel and I and II Kings (MT), biblical censure is levied against the kings of Israel for failing to perform their official duties and conduct their private affairs with integrity and in accordance with the ethical code outlined in the Torah. In the coda of the Book of Judges, at a time "*when there was no king in Israel*", such censure is levied against those who then had spiritual responsibility for Israel – the Levites.

The Levite's *subject* position within the narrative of Judges 19 is important to the narrator's purposes, but so too is his *object* position. In other words, the narrator is concerned both with what the Levite *does* as well as with what is *done to* him. As guardians of both the cult and the Law, the Levites were vested with a measure of social power and prestige – but this came at a cost. Upon Israel's entry into the land of Canaan each of the tribes of Israel received an allotment, or *naḥalah* (נחלה), of territory. The Levites, however, did not. It was said that their *naḥalah* was the LORD (Deut 10:8-9; 18:1-5).[51] Though the people of Israel were commanded to provide the Levites with the necessities of life and were to give the Levites cities in which to live from within their tribal territories (Num 35:1-8; Josh 21), the house of Levi became "*divided in Jacob, and scattered in Israel*".[52] The landless Levite became a perpetual stranger or alien,[53] a sojourner, or *ger* (גר), in the land of Israel – a *ger* dependent on the good will of his brethren for food, shelter, and hospitality. Marginalized within the community and grouped with other disadvantaged members – the slave, the alien, the widow and the orphan – the Levite became the subject of explicit commands designed to protect the

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[51] While the term, *naḥalah*, is frequently translated as "inheritance", Habel (1995) argues that in many instances this is not an appropriate translation. The term is variously applied to the land of Canaan as a whole (a land grant given to the people of Israel), to portions of the land allotted to ancestral families, to the people of Israel (Israel is YHWH's chosen portion amongst all the peoples of the earth), and to the deity (YHWH is the Levites' portion instead of a land allotment). Habel defines *naḥalah* as, "a rightful share or allotment, an approved entitlement to land, property, or people . . . Only in familial contexts, where the head of the ancestral household gives the *naḥalah* to children, does the derived meaning of "inheritance" fit this term (Ruth 4:5-6, 10; Judg 11:2; Num 27:7)"(p. 35). Consequently, Habel employs the terms, share, portion, entitlement, allotment, and rightful property as context dictates.

[52] The social circumstances of Levites in Israel recalls the curse laid upon the house of Levi by Jacob for so fiercely avenging the rape of Dinah (Gen 34): "*Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce, and their wrath, for it is cruel! I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel*" (Gen 49:7).

[53] The equation of the Levite with the alien is made particularly evident in Deut 26:11 in which we read, "*. . . you, together with the Levites and the alien who reside among you, shall celebrate with all the bounty that the LORD your God has given you and to your house.*"

underprivileged in Israelite society (Deut 12:11-12; 14:27-29; 18:1-8; 26:11-12).[54] The special attention given "the Levite" in the biblical law codes makes the events that unfold in Judges 19 all the more significant. In the biblical corpus, particularly in the prophets, Israel's treatment of the disenfranchised and underprivileged becomes a measure of its ethical character. The story told in Judges 19 becomes a pointed exploration of this theme as it observes the hospitality and inhospitality that is shown to *a particular Levite* and his entourage.

Furthermore, the Levite's relationship to the Holy allows the author to graphically represent the terrible rupture that develops between Israel and God at this time when "*there was no king in Israel*". Paradoxically this rupture is represented through contact – the violent contact of rape. In that the Levite stands before the people of Israel as God's representative, *he is associated with God's very holiness*. He occupies a liminal space between God and the house of Israel, acting as a conduit through which contact is made and maintained. However, though it is through the Levite that access to the Holy is accomplished, it is also through the Levite that *the Holy is made vulnerable* – vulnerable to defilement. As one who ministers to the LORD, the Levite is set apart and subject to ritual protection to prevent his contamination by that which is "unclean". Such contamination, through transference, poses a threat to that which is Holy.[55] Hence, God is *made known* but is also *made vulnerable* in the person of the Levite.

The exposition of our tale introduces a second character pivotal to the development of the story line, "*a woman, a concubine from Bethlehem of Judah*". She, like the Levite, is nameless. Her namelessness is a concern for a number of feminist critics. Among these are Bal and Exum. They argue that by leaving the woman nameless the narrator denies

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[54] Contra Trible (1984: 66) who over-states the Levite's position of honour and status in Israelite society.

[55] Concern for the contamination of the holy finds explicit expression in Leviticus 21. While this passage pertains to Aaronic priests, rather than to Levites, it is of particular interest to this study because it specifically addresses instances whereby the daughter or wife of a cultic figure can compromise his sanctity or purity (see vs. 4,7,9).

her "subjectivity" or full "personhood" and subtly gives expression to a patriarchal ideology that denies women agency in the social order.[56] Drawing on the woman's place of origin, Bethlehem, Bal gives her the name of *Beth* (house). Exum names her *Bath-sheber* (daughter of breaking) as a reminder of the violence that comes to befall this woman's body and spirit. Contrary to Bal and Exum, I would argue that accepting the woman's namelessness allows her to stand, and to lie, before us as "Every Woman" – a woman with whom every woman can identify. Reinhartz observes that "(a)nonymity . . . points to the universality and paradigmatic nature of (the nameless one's) experience."[57] Like all women the concubine has the propensity to act with independent agency, but like many her personhood is also defined and constrained by the role she plays as a daughter and as a wife in a patriarchal society. Like all women her very existence is largely defined by her sexuality, her propensity for maternity, and her mortality. Women, in particular, can relate to her circumstances as these definitive aspects of her being come into play with the unfolding of the narrative.

The social status of the woman is established at the outset; she is designated a *pilegesh* (פִּילֶגֶשׁ), translated by many as "concubine". No mention is made of a primary wife, but the clear designation of the woman as a *pilegesh* suggests that she is not a full status wife. The term is used elsewhere in the Bible to refer to women who belong to a royal harem (cp. II Sam 5:13; 15:16), but it is also used to refer to women who have the status of a secondary wife (cp. Gen 22:24; 25:6; 35:22; 36:12; Judg 8:31). A *pilegesh* was taken into the home of a man for the purposes of sexual pleasure, or, in the event that his primary wife was unable to conceive, of providing him with offspring.[58]

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[56] In her discussion of the story of Jephthah's daughter (Judg 11), Bal (1988: 43) has this to say concerning the naming of biblical characters: "To name this nameless character is to violate the biblical text. Not to name her is to violate her with the text, endorsing the text's ideological position." See also note 7.

[57] Reinhartz (1998: 88).

[58] In *Death and Dissymmetry* (1988), Bal argues that the woman is not a "secondary wife" or concubine, but a "nomad-wife" or "patrilocal-wife" joined to the Levite under the terms of an ancient form of marriage known as "beena marriage". In such marriages the woman, though married, would remain in the home of her father and receive periodic visits from her husband (hence, she argues, the necessity for travel in Judges

In our narrative the woman's complete subordination gives us some indication of just how limited the rights of such women were in Israelite society. She, like her husband, occupies a marginalized position: he within the sphere of the nation, she within the sphere of the home. Both are vulnerable; both are dependent on the beneficence of others.

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19). Bal renames this form of marriage "patrilocal" marriage and opposes it to "virilocal" marriage in which the woman is taken into her husband's home and clan. Bal's principal argument is that the underlying tension generating the narrative line of Judges 19 is a social transition from the more traditional patrilocal form of marriage to virilocal marriage. She contends that this tension finds expression first in a power struggle between the father and husband for "ownership" of "the woman", and later in the Benjaminite attack upon the Levite and "his woman" as a form of punishment for the Levite's challenge to the rules of a patrilocal social order (pp. 80-93). The woman is a daughter/wife "caught between systems, between men"(p. 91), and she dies as a result of the conflict.

I am at odds with Bal's reading. Firstly, with the possible exception of Judges 8:31, the meaning Bal imputes to *pilegesh* does not fit with biblical occurrences of the term (See also Exum, 1993: 177, n. 13). Furthermore, I am not convinced that the conflict she describes is present in the text. While the Levite's control of the sexuality and person of his concubine, or lack thereof, is indeed an issue in the narrative, I do not see the underlying problem in the narrative being the erosion of an ancient marital institution, but the erosion of *Torah*, the moral and social code of Israel that binds it together as a community. Narrative tension in Judges 19 is generated by the dissonance between what the Israelites come to see "as right in their own eyes" and the covenantal vision of Israel as a "holy people" (Lev 19:2). The narrative's concern with disorder in the community is intensified by its attention to what is *done by* and *done to* a Levite – one associated with the Holiness of God and vested with the responsibility of preserving *Torah* in the Promised Land. The marital union between the Levite and his concubine becomes a signifier of a general breakdown of social relations in Israel. Their union is challenged both from within by the behavior of the concubine and the Levite, and from without by the behavior of the men of Gibeah (see note 69). In the course of events, mores designed for the protection of the community and its individual members – particularly those most vulnerable – are either disregarded or distorted so that good is transformed into evil. Bal's premise allows her to focus on the person and role of the unnamed woman in the narrative, and in so doing she contributes significantly to the discussion of Judges 19, but I would contend that her basic premise is a faulty one, a fault that undermines the general thrust of her argument.

See Rabin (1974: esp. pp. 361-362) for a discussion of the term.

As with the Levite, the woman's anonymity directs our attention to her role and the way in which her behavior conforms to the rules associated with such a role. In the designation, *pilegesh*, the woman's sexuality and propensity for maternity are foregrounded. As a result, we focus on how she acts and is acted upon as a sexual being within the confines of a marital relationship with a Levite. As the tale progresses we see that her behavior stretches the limits of her role designation and compromises their marriage.[59]

The woman is not only nameless, she is also voiceless. Unlike the male characters in the tale (even the servant boy), she never once utters a word. It is as though the narrator has intentionally structured his narrative to ensure she remains voiceless.[60] In the absence of speech we can only know her through her actions, and more often than not, she is an object acted upon rather than a subject who acts independently.[61] It could be argued that she is a flat character, even a prop, raised just to be killed in order to further the plot. Such an analysis, however, understates the importance of her presence for the development of the plot and for the underlying meaning of the text.[62]

In this particular narrative it is not the characters, in and of themselves, that are important; it is the relations that obtain between them that are the focus – relations for the good and for the bad. The text is not concerned with *the personality of* the woman, but

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[59] In Judges 9, the story of Abimelech suggests that liaisons with *pilegesh* are potentially destabilizing. It will be recalled that Abimelech, "the man who would be king", was the son of Gideon and a *pilegesh* of Shechem (8:31).

[60] Later I shall explore how this technique throws the "language of her body" into relief.

[61] As a character the concubine stands in sharp contrast to the figure of Deborah in Judges 4-5. Deborah is given both name and voice (even a song that occupies an entire chapter!), and she occupies a *subject* position in the text – a position of authority generally held by male figures. The contrast that exists between the presentation of these two female figures in the Book of Judges intensifies our awareness of the concubine's powerlessness. Josipovici (1988:130) observes that Deborah's song (Judg 5) gives us "a sense of the silent victims as well as of the exultant victors". Through the depiction of the mother of Sisera in the song, victims of violence are given "voice", a "voice" so noticeably absent in Judges 19.

[62] See also Bal (1988: 33-36).

with the fact that she *is* a woman in Israelite society. Her gender, and its associated vulnerability, is of fundamental importance to the unfolding of the story. As a woman she is associated by marriage to a Levite, a Levite of Ephraim; through her this Levite is brought into relationship with a father-in-law who resides in Bethlehem, of Judah; furthermore, through her the Benjaminites of Gibeah levy an attack upon the Levite, "a stranger in their gates", a stranger who is, nevertheless, their *kinsman*; and finally, through her, through the bits and pieces of this nameless daughter of Israel, the entire nation is drawn together. The narrator of the story of the Levite and his concubine is concerned not so much with fleshing out the characters of the tale, but with giving us insight into the *character of Israel*, a people who choose to do "what was right in their own eyes".

While the gender of this nameless woman bears significance, so too does her national identity. Though her social status is compromised as a *pilegesh*, within the parameters of the biblical world she is, nonetheless, *a daughter of Israel*. Significantly, the marriage alliance that is formed between the Levite and this woman does not contravene Mosaic Law which prohibits intermarriage with the people of Canaan:

> *Make no covenant with them and show no mercy. Do not intermarry with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons, for that would turn away your children from following me, to serve other gods. Then the anger of the* LORD *would be kindled against you, and he would destroy you quickly.* (Deut 7:2b-4; cp. Gen 24:3-4; 28:1-2; 34; Josh 23:12-13; Judg 3:5-7; 14:3).

In the Samson saga, which immediately precedes the coda, Samson's liaisons with non-Israelite women receive considerable attention. His relations with these women propel the narrative and result in a series of conflicts with the Philistines that eventually lead to his own death. In Judges 19, with its focus on a marriage alliance between a woman from the house of Judah and a Levite from Ephraim, the storyteller turns our attention away from Israel's relations with the "other nations" and directs it toward the internal relations of the house of Israel. But, although there is this shift in focus, the

violence and death that pervade the rest of the book continue unabated; violence is turned inward and ultimately perpetrated upon one of Israel's most vulnerable – a concubine from Bethlehem of Judah.

The narrator's attention to intra-familial dynamics does not change as the coda progresses. In fact, it continues until the very end of the Book of Judges. The principle of endogamy in Israel, a principle oriented to the strengthening of the nation, continues to influence developments in the narrative; in the coda, however, preservation of the principle involves the compromise of other fundamental principles (those prohibiting abduction, rape, and murder in Israel). The hapless concubine of Judges 19 is but the first among many daughters of Israel who, in Judges 20-21, come to suffer abuse at the hands of their kinsmen. Her experience anticipates that of her sisters. Her screams – which are not given voice in the narrative – are but the first in a chorus of screams "heard" by the reader in the depths of his/her imagination.

The narrator of our story is very intentional about situating his characters within the sacred geography of Israel. "The land" in which the tale unfolds – Israel's *naḥalah* – is much more than a backcloth to the drama; it has a dramatic influence upon the development of the storyline. In fact, as the tale progresses, setting takes on ironic importance. *Where* certain events take place is just as important as the events themselves.[63] The storyteller pays careful attention to place names as well as to the specific location of certain characters. In so doing he creates a series of spatial juxtapositions: Ephraim of the north is contrasted with Bethlehem of the south; Israelite cities are set over and against those that belong to the "uncircumcised"; open country is juxtaposed to the space "inside the gates" of a town; the interior of a dwelling place is

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[63] Bal (1997: 136) discusses how space functions in narrative: "The space (may) remain entirely in the background. In many cases however, space is 'thematized': it becomes an object of presentation itself, for its own sake. Space thus becomes an 'acting place' rather than the place of action. It influences the fabula, and the fabula becomes subordinate to the presentation of space. The fact that 'this is happening here' is just as important as 'the way it is here'."

contrasted with what lies beyond the door; and liminal spaces – borderlands and thresholds – also come to hold dramatic import.

In his discussion of time and space in biblical narrative Bar Efrat makes the assertion:

> . . . biblical narratives are dominated by movement. In most narratives the movement of the characters is more or less marginal to the plot, but in some of them movement constitutes a central structural element, serving as the focal point of the plot.[64]

The latter holds true for Judges 19. The exposition establishes the boundaries of the space within which the narrative to follow will unfold: the hill country of Ephraim and Bethlehem of Judah. What the exposition does not reveal is that two journeys will take place within this space, the journey of a Levite and that of an unnamed woman. Their journeys, both separate and together, trace a north-south axis within the Promised Land. As the narrator describes their movement across the land his attention to time and space creates a remarkably cinematographic effect: at times the view he presents is panoramic, at times it is painfully intimate. The observations of contemporary film analysts help us appreciate the resulting effect. Louis Giannetti and Jim Leach observe that movement across a landscape can serve to emphasize "both the unity and the disunity of the space as well as the connectedness and disconnectedness of the people and cities within that space".[65] Within the landscape of our tale we are made mindful of kindred relationships that bind; but the violence that is eventually perpetrated at the centre of this space – in the very heart of Israel – reveals a people and a land deeply divided. Through his exploration of the hospitality afforded Israelites *by* Israelites the narrator is able to draw our attention to division within the community.

Both territory and territorialism play a role in the tale of the Levite and his concubine.

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[64] Bar-Efrat (1989: 186).
[65] Giannetti and Leach (1998: 103).

In their hour of need the travelling Levite and his company find themselves *in the heart of the Promised Land* – a land that has yet to be secured from the Canaanites. They find themselves in the territory of Benjamin, a borderland that stands between Ephraim of the north and Judah of the south. It is here that disaster befalls the couple, and in particular, the nameless woman of Bethlehem of Judah. The places named in the narrative are not merely geographical facts. While they serve to create narrative space, they also point to underlying tensions within the house of Israel. The juxtaposition of Ephraim and Judah recalls the earlier history of intra-familial conflict between the sons of Rachel and the sons of Leah. It also anticipates the later division that develops between the northern and southern kingdoms of Israel. Furthermore, the two cities visited by the Levite and his concubine, Bethlehem and Gibeah, are associated with significant figures in Israel's subsequent history, a history that traces the stories of King Saul of the tribe of Benjamin, and his successor King David of Bethlehem of Judah.[66] These correspondences link the story of the nameless Levite and his equally nameless concubine to the larger story of Israel. The events that overtake them "*in those days when there was no king in Israel*" set the tone for later tensions that arise in the days when *there were* kings in Israel.

The storyteller's concern with space – with territories and boundaries – also finds expression in the way in which the woman is figured in the narrative. Her body becomes the site in which social boundaries are transgressed, both marital and tribal. The world in which she lives and dies is a patriarchal one. Phyllis Bird describes how a woman's sexuality was understood in such a society: "In Israel's moral code, a woman's sexuality was understood to belong to her husband alone, for whom it must be reserved in anticipation of marriage as well as in the marriage bond."[67] The concubine in our tale is not an independent woman;[68] as a result her sexual vulnerability lays open the vulnerability of all with whom she is associated: her tribe by birth, her husband by

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[66] Significantly, King Saul was to build his headquarters at Gibeah, the very site of the "outrage".

[67] Bird (1989: 77).

[68] Comparing the concubine to the figure of Delilah in the Samson narratives helps us to appreciate the constraints placed upon the concubine's sexuality as a result of her status.

marriage, even the host who welcomes her into his home along with her husband. To transgress the sexual boundaries of a married/owned woman through an act of illicit sex, be it through extramarital fornication or rape, is to compromise the masculinity and honour of the man to whom she belongs as well as the integrity of the patrilineal family unit to which he belongs.[69] In a tribal society, the transgression of intertribal boundaries may be symbolically accomplished through the violent act of rape (cp. Gen 34).[70] A woman, like the land, is "a field for plowing" by her husband/owner. Like the land, she is guarded from trespass by those who would impinge on his "territory" in an act of aggression.[71] Alice Keefe, in an insightful discussion of sexual imagery in the Bible (particularly in Hosea), draws the following connections:

> In a society that defines itself through a 'proper' (here specifically a patriarchal) order of sexual relations, textual images of the sexual transgression of women (including rape and adultery) figure the disintegration of societal bonds. Not only in the prophets, but throughout biblical narratives, one persistently finds a rendering of

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[69] Delaney's (1987) study of traditional Turkish village culture reveals similar social anxieties with regards to women's sexuality. She observes, "the value of males derives from the social perception of their ability to engender; it is the foundation upon which honor is built. At the same time, this understanding of procreation engenders an extreme anxiety about the "legitimacy" of a child. "Legitimacy" here means not so much that a child is the product of a legitimate marriage, but that he or she can be legitimately attributed to a particular man. *The entire structure is precarious for it can be shaken by the behavior of women.* In other words, the ability to generate seed is a source of pride for men; however, a man's honor depends on knowing that a child is from his own seed. This assurance entails the control of women" (p. 40) (emphasis mine).

[70] The rape of women in war, in both biblical and contemporary contexts, is another means by which an aggressor humiliates his opponent and demonstrates dominance over him. In "Violence and the Construction of Gender in the Hebrew Bible: A New Historicist Approach" (1997: 324-363), Washington does an extensive study of "the discursive connections between violence and gender in the Hebrew Bible". He argues that this discourse validates the practices of warfare as well as violence against women. See also Thistlethwaite (1993).

[71] See also Delaney (1987: 38-40).

> societal and political issues through stories of sexual encounters, licit and illicit . . . the thrice repeated conjunction of rape and war in the biblical narratives (Gen. 34, Judg. 19, 2 Sam. 13) suggests the presence of a literary convention in which the female body figures the social body, such that the sexual violence of rape serves as a metonym for internecine violence.[72]

Not only does the sexual transgression of the woman's body in Judges 19 figure the moral and social disintegration of Israelite society, it comes to figure the disintegration of Israel's covenantal relationship with God. In that the woman is the concubine of a Levite, yet another boundary is transgressed through the medium of her body – the boundary that separates the sacred from the profane. Through her, the sanctity of God is put at risk.

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[72] Keefe (1995: 89-90).

CHAPTER III: REUNIFICATION ?

Having sketched the broad landscape within which his two principal characters will move, the narrator now informs us that the bond established between the Levite and his concubine has been compromised. The sundering of the bond that exists between them pre-figures a massive breakdown in social relations to follow.

> 2. *But his concubine fornicated/played the harlot against him, and she went away from him to the house of her father in Bethlehem of Judah and she stayed there for four months.* 3. *And her husband arose and went after her to speak to her heart to bring her back . . .*

Judges 19 possesses a remarkable realism. In spite of the fact that the structure of the tale is antithetically symmetrical, it is not a black and white story of good guys and bad guys, of victims and their abusers. The presentation of the characters, especially the Levite and his concubine, is much more nuanced. How they act, and how they are acted upon, complicates our assessment of their characters as well as our attitude toward them as persons. Upon reading the first half of the tale we may be more sympathetically inclined to the Levite than his concubine; but in the second half, when we are presented with his callous treatment of her and the terrible crimes perpetrated against her, our sympathies radically shift.

The drama of the tale is initiated by an act (or more) performed by the unnamed woman. She is the "subject" of an action at this point in the narrative rather than the "object". If we follow the Masoretic text, we read that the concubine "fornicated" or "played the harlot" against her husband (ותזנה עליו פילגשו). Bird, in a careful study of the Hebrew word *zanah* (זנה), claims it is a general term for illicit extramarital sexual relations that *may* include the activity of a professional prostitute. In other words, the term is applied to a woman who engages in illicit sex whether she is a "casual

fornicator" or a "professional prostitute".[73] The text does not inform us that the concubine received payment for sexual services, but regardless, her actions must be understood as violating her husband's sexual rights and compromising their marital union (cp. Gen 35:22; Gen 49:4; II Sam 16: 21-22).

Some commentators opt for the Septuagint rendering of verse 2 which can be translated as: "*But his concubine became angry with him, and she went away from him to her father's house . . .*".[74] Gale Yee voices the concern of many interpreters.[75] She argues that the Masoretic text does not make interpretive sense. Biblical law dictates that the woman should be put to death for the offense (Deut 22:21-22; Lev 20:10). Why then, Yee asks, would the woman's father provide her sanctuary, and why would her husband seek to "reclaim" her? Yee eventually settles for the Masoretic reading but suggests that the term *zanah* is better understood figuratively, i.e. that the woman, in the very act of abandoning her husband, is "metaphorically" guilty of fornication according to Deuteronomic law.[76]

Bal, by means of interpretive gymnastics, also absolves the concubine of the charge of illicit sex. As noted earlier, Bal holds that a social transition from a more traditional patrilocal form of marriage to a virilocal form of marriage generates the conflict in

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[73] Bird (1989: 77). Bird makes the insightful observation that the story of Judah and Tamar (Gen 38) pivots around the dual meaning (fornication and prostitution) of the term *zanah*.

[74] NRSV which follows the Septuagint. Kamuf (1993: 192) and Ackerman (1998: 237) adopt this reading. The Septuagint's rendering of the term is also preferred by some non-feminist scholars such as Boling (1975: 273-274, n. 2). Trible is non-committal on the subject and argues that the story allows for either reading (1984: 66-67). Fewell (1992: 75) reads the verb *zanah* as *zanach* and claims the young woman "resists" the Levite.

[75] See also Bohmbach (1999: 90), Exum (1993: 178), and Boling (1975: n. 2, 273-274).

[76] Yee (1995: 162). Exum also assumes this position (1995: 83-84). Jones-Warsaw (1993: 174) takes the Masoretic text seriously and poses a possible scenario in which, after the consummation of the marriage, the Levite accuses the woman of not being a virgin at the time of their nuptial agreement (cp. Deut 22:13-21).

Judges 19. She interprets the word *zanah* on the basis of this supposition and argues that, from the father-owner's "patrilocal" perspective, the woman/daughter is "unfaithful" to him when she leaves to visit her husband; and conversely, that from the husband-owner's "virilocal" perspective, the woman/wife is unfaithful to *him* when she leaves for her father's home. According to Bal, the woman's act of *zanah* is not associated with sexual transgression, but with a failure on her part to respect restrictions on movement dictated by the two contrary marital institutions. In other words, the woman is not guilty of promiscuity; she is merely an "unfaithful", inter-institutional woman.[77]

The efforts of Bal and others to "make sense" of this narrative are fruitless. If we read Judges 19 as the companion piece to the narrative of Micah and the Danites, *we should not expect things to "make sense".* In Judges 17-18 Micah has graven images made out of silver that was consecrated to YHWH; a Levitic priest is quite happy to preside over the graven images in Micah's private shrine; and the entire tribe of Dan is eager to acquire and re-install these graven images in a new tribal shrine! Is it any wonder then, that in a time when "*everyman did what was right in his own eyes*", a woman might behave promiscuously, that her husband might not exercise his right to punish her, or that her father might offer her sanctuary in spite of her waywardness? In this time "*when there was no king in Israel*" no one's behavior appears to conform to the moral and social code set down by Moses. For this reason alone I am inclined to accept the Masoretic text's depiction of the concubine as a promiscuous woman – even a whore.

There are, however, a number of other reasons to opt for the Masoretic reading.

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[77] Bal (1988: 179). Bal's argument hinges on her treatment of the preposition *'al* (עַל) in verse 2 (pp. 86-88). She claims that the preposition can be interpreted as referring to *the father* when the antecedent to the *'al* is clearly the Levite, just as the Levite is the antecedent to the masculine pronouns that follow the preposition *'al* in v. 2. Hence we read: "there was a man, *a Levite* sojourning in the hill country of Ephraim; and *he* took to *himself* a woman (wife), a concubine from Bethlehem of Judah. But she played the harlot *against him*, *his* concubine, and she went *away from him* to the house of her father. . . ." Bal sees ambiguity where there really is none and proceeds to propose that *the father* is the offended party in the story. Not only does Bal distort a "plain sense" reading of the text, but her thesis also fails to adequately account for the conflict that arises later in Gibeah.

Firstly, the stark realism of the tale – and not to mention the biblical corpus as a whole – allows the possibility that none of the characters in this drama is "without blemish". Secondly, there is a symbolic link between the concubine's involvement with multiple lovers at the outset, her rape by multiple rapists at Gibeah, and the eventual dispersal of her body parts to multiple recipients at the end of the tale. And thirdly, the woman's figuration as promiscuous echoes a central theme within the Book of Judges: Israel's unfaithfulness to *her* lord, YHWH. Israel, like a wayward woman, is presented as "whoring after" graven images and the gods of other nations (Judg 2:11-13,17; 3:7; 8:27, 33-34; 10:6, 10, 13-14; 17:5; 18:30). This thematic connection suggests that, at a symbolic level, the unnamed woman may figure Israel. In other words, the depiction of the woman in the Masoretic text is consistent with the symbolic and narrative patterns already established in the Book of Judges as well as the larger biblical corpus. For all these reasons the Masoretic text is to be preferred.[78]

The narrator of our tale, in keeping with the tone and content already established in Judges 17-18, dramatically presents the breakdown of a complex system of moral and social codes in Israel. The woman's act of fornication is presented as one act in a whole series of similar acts – acts indicative of a serious breakdown of relationships and order

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[78] The temporal note that the woman remained in Bethlehem for a period of four months (v. 2) might also be an indicator of promiscuity on her part. Some suggestions have been proposed to explain this duration of time, i.e. that the concubine's secondary status did not merit immediate response, or that the Levite's wounded pride needed time to heal (see Yee [1995: 162, n. 36]; and Jones-Warsaw [1993: 175]), but another possibility has been proposed by Schneider (1985: 253): "If the woman had sexual relations with another man, four months would be the amount of time to determine for certain, at least for those without modern medicine, whether the woman was pregnant." Schneider's suggestion has intertextual support: it will be recalled that, after a period of about *three months*, Judah's daughter-in-law, Tamar, was found to be pregnant and accused of "playing the whore" (Gen 38:24). The relative correspondence in time and phrasing (both texts employ the root *zanah*) between these two narratives lends credence to Schneider's observation. Perhaps the Levite goes after the woman only when it can be ascertained that his "wife of promiscuity/ harlotry" *is not* bearing any "children of promiscuity/ harlotry" (cp. Hosea 1:2), i.e. the offspring of another man and public evidence of her offence against him.

in the land of Israel. Through her unfaithfulness the woman transgresses the boundaries of her role as a concubine/wife. Not only does her behavior undermine the sanctity of her union with the Levite, but because he *is* a Levite, it compromises the sanctity of his "office" as priest. Her promiscuity places her within the religious category of the *profane*. According to Israel's sacral code – a code that dictates the separation of the sacred from the profane – continued contact with the woman on the part of the Levite risks defilement of the sacred. Because of her association with the Levite the woman's sexuality takes on a value that supersedes that of other women: through him her sexuality is linked to the Holy – it makes the Holy vulnerable.

According to Deuteronomic law it would be within the rights of the Levite to have the woman put to death (cp. Deut 22:22). But he does not. His failure to punish her with the full weight of the law is consistent with practice demonstrated elsewhere in the biblical texts. Henry McKeating, in a study of sanctions against adultery in Israelite society, observes:

> As far as adultery is concerned, the law constitutes a forceful statement of what is desirable. Marital fidelity is desirable and anything that threatens it is at least potentially a capital offence. The fact that the law is rarely applied, however, suggests that in practice adultery was not *so* far beyond the bounds of the tolerable.[79]

Despite the fact that the Levite is one "consecrated to the LORD", and despite the fact that his concubine is now "dangerous" in her defilement, the Levite goes after her.[80] Though his actions appear merciful, they endanger the Holy; they also endanger the nation of Israel. Action or inaction taken on the part of a Levite that compromises the sacral code is seen to have consequences for all of Israel: should a Levite accept depravity, so too

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[79] McKeating (1979: 69).

[80] Having noted that the woman's "promiscuity/harlotry" is symbolically linked to the "whoredom" of Israel in relation to YHWH, we might see the Levite's pursuit of her as mimetic of YHWH's continued pursuit of Israel despite her unfaithfulness.

might all the land. We need only look to the story of the Levite and the Danites for confirmation of the connection. As noted earlier, Judges 17-18 depicts a Levite who contravenes the sacral code as it pertains to his cultic function in the public sphere, i.e. he presides over graven images; in Judges 19 a Levite is shown to contravene this code in the private sphere – the domestic sphere, i.e. he spares his "wife of promiscuity/ harlotry" from punishment and pursues her (cp. Hosea 1:2). In a manner of speaking, these companion narratives present two sides of the same coin.

The Levite, with servant boy and asses in tow, sets out from the hill country of Ephraim to Bethlehem of Judah in order to "*speak to the heart*" of his concubine and bring her back.[81] We presume that he seeks reconciliation and reunification with her. As the narrative proceeds we anticipate an encounter between the offended husband and his wayward wife. Curiously, however, the narrator gives their eventual encounter only brief mention (v. 3), and focuses instead on what transpires between the Levite and the father of the unnamed woman. The next six verses (vs. 4-9), a considerable length of narrative space, are dedicated to a description of the interactions between the guest and his host. The woman is seemingly absent.

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[81] Trible (1984: 67) claims that usage of the expression "speak to her heart" connotes reassurance, loyalty and love. Bal (1988: 90) sees this as an overly romantic reading of the phrase. She argues that within the biblical worldview the heart was the site of reason, not feeling, and that the Levite's intent is to reason with his concubine and rationally persuade her to return. One wonders whether, from this distance, we can presume to make any distinction between feeling and reason in the psyche of the Ancient Hebrews. In debate with Sternberg (1985), Fewell and Gunn (1991) discuss the phrase as it is used in Genesis 34:3. Fewell and Gunn suggest that in the context of Genesis 34 it is a perlocutionary expression, i.e. "a speech act *that produces consequential effects* on the feelings, thoughts, or actions of its hearers" (p. 196) (emphasis mine); that the expression "he (Shechem) spoke to the young woman's (Dinah's) heart" indicates both the speech act of Shechem and a positive response on the part of Dinah. Sternberg (1992: 476-477) takes issue with their reading and argues that the expression is purely idiomatic, that it refers to a speech act of good or kind words designed to move the heart of the addressee, but that it does not imply such is accomplished.

The expected conversation between the couple is not recorded – perhaps it never takes place. In this episode of the narrative, only the speech of the father (father of the maid/father-in-law) is recorded. He repeatedly prevails upon the Levite, his "son-in-law" and guest, to stay the night and/or take nourishment. Communion between the father-in-law and son-in-law in the act of eating and drinking together – emphasized especially in the phrasing of verse 6 (ו יאכלו שניהם יחדו וישתו) – heightens our awareness of the absence of union between the husband and his wife. The silent presence of the woman in the shadows haunts the exclusive company of men.[82]

While the interactions between the two men are foregrounded, the appellations given the men make us ever mindful of the woman's presence in the background. The namelessness of the men requires them to be identified in relation to the woman and to the family unit established in the alliance of marriage.[83] The host is repeatedly identified as "father-in-law" or "father of the maid" [84] while his guest, the Levite, is identified as "son-in-law". Not only do these designations subtly suggest the presence of the woman, they also point to her youth (*na'arah* [נערה]), and imply her status of "daughter" (see vs. 3,4,5,6,8,9): she is a daughter of the tribe of Judah and therefore a daughter of Israel.

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[82] Cp. Genesis 18, and the text's overt "mindfulness" of Sarah's presence in the background when Abraham receives the three men/angels of God.

Levy (2000: 46) argues that in the final three chapters of Judges "women are constantly ignored and left aside in deliberate narrative silence, reflecting and simultaneously criticizing their socially silenced status." He suggests that the silence of, and the silence concerning, women in this narrative has the paradoxical effect of intensifying our awareness of their circumstances.

[83] Socially, the woman bridges the gap between the two men. This "bridging" is given concrete expression in verse 3: it is she who brings her husband into the home of her father. Significantly, this interaction is radically inverted in Part II (v. 25) of the narrative: when the Levite throws his woman out of the house in Gibeah to the rogues in the street, the subject and object positions of the husband and wife are reversed, as are their respective spatial locations. Despite the inversion, however, the woman's role as a "bridge" between men is still maintained.

[84] Twice these two designations stand in apposition to each other, in verse 4 and verse 9. The apposition of the two contrasts the relationship of the father to the two principal characters: one is based on blood, one on social contract.

Within the design of the narrative, this daughter of Israel is *conspicuous in her absence.*

In contradistinction to the concubine's status of "daughter" stands her husband who, through marriage, has the status of a "son" in relation to his "father-in-law". Though the Levite's entourage suggests that he may be a man of means, in relation to his father-in-law he is the inferior. This intrafamilial hierarchy, and the code of hospitality that governs guest-host relations in Israel, both come into play as the narrative proceeds.

Julian Pitt-Rivers, in a study of the laws of hospitality in the Mediterranean, makes a number of observations that help us interpret the situation before us. Though his observations are of contemporary Mediterranean society, the dynamics in Judges 19 suggest that the unspoken charter of hospitality in the region has remained virtually unchanged to this day. He claims that the law of hospitality may be compromised by the host if he insults his guest; if he fails to protect him and his honour; and:

> If he fails to attend to his guests, to grant them the precedence which is their due, to show concern for their needs and wishes or in general to earn the gratitude which guests should show. Failure to offer the best is to denigrate the guest. Therefore it must always be maintained that, however far from perfect his hospitality may be, it is the best he can do.[85]

The father-in-law in Bethlehem of Judah does not fail his guest. His hospitality is extravagant! One wonders what motivates the father-in-law's persistent and excessive generosity. Is he attempting to compensate his son-in law in some way for the offence done to him by his daughter? Is he trying to delay their departure because he harbours some anxiety for her future safety?[86] Does the fact that his guest is a Levite motivate his

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[85] Pitt-Rivers (1977: 110).

[86] The vulnerability of daughters is a recurrent theme in the Book of Judges, as it is elsewhere in the Bible. Both Jephthah's daughter (Judg 11) and the daughter of the Timnite (Judg 15) meet violent deaths. The recurrence of this theme has the effect of creating some anxiety on the part of the reader for the future safety of the woman. The father's delaying tactics give the reader further reason to worry.

Bal (1988: 90-91) argues that the father, in detaining the Levite, seeks to retain his daughter who

extravagance? Or, is he simply endeavoring to be a good host?

Some commentators offer a rather cynical reading of the situation. They see a game of masculine power politics at play between host and guest. Bal suggests that their interaction represents the "struggle of the father against his 'successor' – the virilocal husband – the man who takes over his daughter."[87] David Penchansky makes the assertion: "The father-in-law, for purposes unknown, uses the formula of hospitality to manipulate the Levite, to prey upon his weakness and his lack of resolve."[88] Yee sees the dynamic between the two as a struggle "among men for honor and status" in which the subordination of the guest is accomplished through the host's extravagance.[89] In other words, she sees the father-in-law's generosity as economic posturing, as an act of male dominance? Biblical texts suggest, however, that a different dynamic is at work in the guest-host relationship. The good host does not seek to subordinate his guest through acts of generosity; rather, in an effort to do honour to the guest, he adopts the attitude and position of *a servant* in attending to his guest's every need. For confirmation of this we might look to the model of hospitality set by Abraham in his encounter with the men/angels of God (Gen 18). Like Abraham, the father of the concubine in Judges 19 is also presented as a paragon of hospitality.

How do we explain the Levite's behavior? Is he, as Penchansky sees it, weak and indecisive? Does he overstay his welcome? Again we can look to Pitt-Rivers for assistance. He observes that *the guest* contravenes the law of hospitality if he insults the host or attempts to rival him; if he "usurps the role of host" by presuming to take what has not been offered; and *if he refuses to accept what is offered.* Pitt-Rivers notes:

> Food and drink always have ritual value, for the ingestion together of a common substance creates a bond. Commensality is the basis of community in a whole

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belongs in *his* home according to the dictates of the "patrilocal" marital institution.

[87] Bal, (1988: 88).

[88] Penchansky (1992: 82).

[89] Yee (1995: 163).

> number of contexts. Therefore the guest is bound above all to accept food. Any refusal reflects in fact upon the host's capacity to do honour; and this is what the guest must uphold.[90]

Is the Levite, then, simply a good guest complying with the wishes of his host and allowing him to do him honour? If we examine verses 4-9 we see that the narrator only begins to record the father's words when he extends an invitation to the Levite to linger on the fourth morning. Even though the father gives the Levite license to leave in the phrasing of his invitation, "*Strengthen your heart with a morsel of bread and after that you may go*" (v. 5), the Levite *allows* himself to be prevailed upon to stay yet another night. Again on the fifth day, the Levite lingers at the request of his father-in-law, but when he *should allow* himself to be prevailed upon, i.e. when it is too late to be starting a journey (v. 9), he declines the invitation. In hospitable and comfortable surroundings the Levite does appear to be rather indecisive, but we shall see that he is perfectly capable of decisive action when faced with Terror.

Given the structural dimensions of this tale, i.e. its antithetical symmetry, it would appear that Part I is constructed as a paradigmatic instance of hospitality in order to accentuate the gross inhospitality the couple receives "in the gates" of Gibeah by the Benjaminites. Even if we allow that a measure of male posturing takes place in the act of hospitality, in Part I this is positively oriented in an effort to do honour. In the second, as we shall see, the very opposite occurs: male posturing is negatively oriented in order to humiliate.

In focusing on the dynamics between the Levite and his father-in-law, it may also be the intention of the narrator to draw our attention to *what he does not say*. Narrative emphasis on the relative "health" of the men's relationship, on their shared meals and shared conversation, activates our awareness that the relationship between the Levite and his concubine remains disturbed. Throughout Part I the marital "problem" that initiated the story remains unresolved; consequently we are ever mindful of the woman despite

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[90] Pitt-Rivers (1992: 109-110).

narrative silence concerning her activity.

As time progresses in Bethlehem we also become mindful of a *leitwort*, or keyword, that peppers the text, the Hebrew root *lin* (לין), which means "to pass/stay the night". Repeatedly the father-in-law presses the Levite to "stay the night", and repeatedly we are informed by the narrator that the Levite complies. Repetition of this *leitwort*, in both narrated discourse and recorded speech, accentuates the extended passage of time. In verse 9, when the Levite prepares to leave late in the day, twice the father-in-law extends the invitation to "stay the night": the first time he uses the enclitic particle *na'* (נא), or "pray/please"; the second time the invitation is expressed more forcefully as an imperative. Given the hour of day, the father's insistence is not only an expression of hospitality, it is an expression of pragmatic concern for the welfare of the travellers. As time passes in Bethlehem the *leitwort* first associated with hospitality comes to be associated with danger – the danger of the night. Its repeated use in Part I points ahead to the long dark night the couple will come to pass in Gibeah. The many nights of warmth and hospitality spent in Bethlehem of Judah are eventually juxtaposed with a single *night of terror* in Gibeah of Benjamin.

In Part I the internal time of the narrative is stretched out, in the second it contracts. In her analysis of this tale Trible makes a number of significant observations about the play of time, the play of time internal to the story in relation to the length of narrative dedicated to describing events within it, i.e. time external to the narrative as experienced in the process of reading. She notes:

> Time periods of shrinking length mark the visit of the master to Bethlehem: three days, another day and night, and a final day . . . Strikingly, as the three periods decrease, the accounts of them increase so that the closer the departure, the longer the delay. The narrated expansion corresponds to the buildup of tension. This pattern foreshadows scene two, the heart of terror, in which the shortest period of time yields the longest narrative and the greatest tension.[91]

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[91] Trible (1984: 68).

Time, like space in this narrative, has a significant influence upon the way the storyline unfolds. Both are as determinative of events as any of the characters. Time separates the couple at the outset of the tale; time is overspent in Bethlehem, especially on the day of the Levite's departure; the travellers must race against time to find a place of sanctuary in the night; and time forces the Levite to make a fateful decision. While we are made mindful of the passing of days and nights in Bethlehem, as the Levite and his company prepare to set out for Ephraim, our attention is focused on the movement of the sun and the passing of hours: in verse 8 we read "*he lingered as the day stretched on*"; in verse 9 the father focuses attention on the sun (that of the other characters as well as that of the reader) when he pleads, "*Pray, look! The day is waning into evening. Please stay the night! Look! The day is drawing to a close. Stay the night here . . .*"; then in verse 11 we read, "*When they were near Jebus it was exceedingly late in the day.*" As the travellers move from south to north across the land, the sun moves from east to west across the sky. As daylight decreases, the prospect of danger increases.

As the sun is setting, the Levite and his entourage – the concubine, the servant-boy, and a pair of bridled asses – stand together on the outskirts of Jebus (which is Jerusalem) (v. 10). The Levite and his concubine are reunited, but there is no indication that they are reconciled to one another. He never speaks to her. Instead a conversation ensues between the Levite and his servant boy. Aside from a brief allusion to the presence of the servant boy in verse 9, there has been no mention of him in the narrative since his introduction in verse 3. The servant boy, *na'ar* (נער), has shared the shadows with the young woman, *na'arah* (נערה). Like the young woman he is one of the Levite's "assets" along with the two bridled asses. But he is male and perhaps this gives him license to speak to his master concerning their options.

The narrator's inclusion of the servant-boy as a minor character in the narrative accomplishes a number of things: 1) his presence serves to suggest that the Levite is a man of some means; 2) he serves as a counterpoint to the concubine: though different in gender (a matter of significance later in the narrative) he shares a similar social status; 3) his status as a servant allows the narrator to present the Levite in the role of "master" in

addition to the roles of son-in-law and husband/master;[92] 4) he fulfills a technical role for the narrator who is able to maintain a position of limited omniscience in relation to his principal character, the Levite, by indirectly revealing the Levite's thoughts, anxieties, and prejudices through the conversation he has with the servant boy; 5) and finally, the servant boy's conversation with his master serves another purpose: it allows the narrator to give voice to the Levite's concerns without giving voice to the woman. Still she remains silent! It is as though the narrator has designed the narrative to ensure her silence. To what purpose does he do so? I shall address this curious feature of the tale when the nameless woman does speak – when she uses her body as language.

The conversation that takes place between the Levite and his servant is a "hinge point" in the narrative. Fokkelman, in his careful attention to detail, describes the artful construction of the conversation. He notes the parallelism of its form and content and the contrast established thereby between Jebus, a city of the "uncircumcised",[93] and Gibeah of Benjamin. Furthermore, he observes that the "middlemost clause" of the construction is verse 12;[94] it is at this point in the discussion that the Levite makes a decision that proves to have disastrous consequences for himself, for his concubine, and for all of

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[92] Jones-Warsaw (1993: 176) observes that while the speech of the servant boy is "respectfully tempered by the enclitic particle *na'*," that of the Levite, who assumes here the role of "lord/master", is more forceful and decisive.

[93] The reference to Jerusalem in the parenthetical note of verse 10 highlights the fact that the background for the story of the Levite and his concubine is Israel's failed conquest of the land of Canaan. We are reminded that the "heart" of Israel, Jerusalem, is still in the hands of the Other, the Jebusites (cp. Judg 1: 7, 8, 21); that God has thwarted Israel's efforts to secure the territory because she continues to "*do evil in the eyes of the LORD*". Adopting a turn of phrase from Exum (1990a) it could be said that "the center does not hold" in the land of Israel. Exum, as noted above, makes the observation: "The political and moral instability depicted in Judges is reflected in the textual instability. The framework deconstructs itself." (p. 412.) In the chaos and confusion that follow upon the couple's entry into a city belonging to the children of Israel – through the perpetration of "*evil in the eyes of the LORD*" – Israel, in effect, deconstructs herself. This deconstruction is given symbolic representation in the dismembered body of the concubine – a nameless daughter of Israel.

[94] Fokkelman (1992: 41-42).

Israel:

> 12. *But his master said to him, "We will not turn into a foreign city which is not of the children of Israel. Now, let us carry on as far as Gibeah."*

Where safety is presumed, it is not. From this point on, as many commentators have observed, the plot develops to create a situation of dramatic irony.

CHAPTER IV: BETWEEN BROTHERS

As the Levite turns into Gibeah the reader is ushered into a new spatial territory within the larger setting of the land. But though the locus of action is new, the story gradually takes on an uncanny familiarity. As our reading progresses we become acutely aware that we are revisiting familiar "literary territory". Literary landmarks encountered in the process of reading bring to mind other times, other places, and other events in the biblical corpus which serve to shape our expectations.

Weston Fields examines a number of motifs that recur in biblical narratives. One of these is the motif of "night-as-danger". Fields claims this motif has the effect of imbuing a narrative with "an aura of foreboding and sinister premonition, of trepidation and anxiety: night and violence, danger and darkness (are) inseparably joined".[95] He observes that the "atmosphere-changing potential" of this motif is used to great effect in Judges 19. The storyteller artfully employs a number of temporal expressions to describe the progressive darkening of the day and thereby instills a sense of anxiety in the reader.[96]

When the Levite makes the decision to seek shelter in Gibeah of Benjamin, tension created through the use of the motif "night-is-danger" is temporarily relieved. But the narrator deliberately misleads the reader at this juncture in the narrative. In the recorded conversation between master and servant the narrator sets up a false set of expectations in our minds. Distinction is made between a place and people associated with danger (Jebus and the Jebusites) and a place and people associated with safe haven (Gibeah and the Benjaminites). We assume that the Levite will receive a welcome not unlike the one

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[95] Fields (1997: 108). Though Fields' remarks are made in relation to the "ancient reader" whose "dread of malevolent darkness can be most fully appreciated only by those who have spent time in places without artificial lighting", I have made more general application of them here.

[96] Fields (1997: 110). These expressions include: "as the day stretched on" (עד נטות היום, v.8); "the day is waning to evening" (רפה היום לערב, v.9); "it was very late in the day" (והיום רד מאד, v. 11); "and the sun went down upon them" (ויבא להם השמש, v. 14); and "at sunset" (בערב, v. 16).

he received in Bethlehem of Judah – after all, he will be amongst his brethren.

The entrance of the Levite and his company into the city of Gibeah activates our memory of another motif common in biblical narrative, that of the "stranger in your gates".[97] As in Bethlehem, hospitality once again is at issue; in this instance, however, the guest presents as a stranger.[98] The motif brings to mind Mosaic Law, which dictates that it is incumbent upon the children of Israel to offer hospitality to the *ger*, the stranger or sojourner "in their gates" (Exod 22:21, 23:9; Deut 10:19). This injunction arises as a sympathetic response to the people of Israel's own experience as strangers or sojourners in the land of Egypt. While Mosaic Law is evoked by the motif, so too is the memory of stories concerned with other travellers – particularly the paradigmatic stories of Genesis that recount the visitation of the "men of God" to Abraham and then to Lot (Gen 18-19). Fields makes the assertion:

> The principles of proper conduct with respect to the stranger are stated in legal literature, and are also exemplified in 'historical' episodes that are set in the constitutive era. The legal notion is expressed in recurring narrative motifs. Such motifs serve as a backdrop for normative legal concepts, whether by way of a negative or positive illustration.[99]

While Part I of Judges 19 provides a positive illustration of the "normative legal concept" of hospitality to the stranger, Part II proves to be a profoundly negative presentation of such. When no one in Gibeah offers the travelling company hospitality we realize that there has been a disruption in the social code. At this particular point in

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[97] For an extended discussion of this motif see Fields, (1997: 35-53).

[98] The Levite is the primary guest within the social structure. His welcome, as we shall see, implies the welcome of all in his company.

[99] Fields (1997: 35). For Fields the "constitutive era" spans the period in Israel's history from creation to the settlement in Canaan. He considers the events of this period to be "paradigmatic, conceptually prescriptive, setting precedent and creating prototypes for all times" (p. 24).

the narrative the residents of Gibeah contravene the code by what they fail to do, rather than by what they do.[100] They are passively inhospitable. It is left to an "outsider" to provide for the wayfarers.

With the Hebrew word *Hinneh* (הִנֵּה), "Behold", the narrator directs our mind's eye away from the unwelcome party in the open square to another character beyond the edge of the city. We read:

> 16. *And behold, an old man was coming from his work in the field at sunset; the man was from the hill country of Ephraim, and he was sojourning in Gibeah, as the men of the place were Benjaminites.*

The old man "lifts up his eyes" and observes the travellers in the open square/plaza (v. 17). Though the narrator has already described the travellers' circumstances to the reader, he presents the scene again as perceived by the old man. To employ a term coined by Bal, at this point in the narrative *focalization* shifts from the narrator to the old man.[101] The situation perceived by the elderly man draws him into relationship with the wayfarers; he is moved to compassion. We shall see that later in the narrative the narrator employs the same technique to the opposite effect.

In the conversation that ensues between the Levite and the old Ephraimite we see the Levite cast in yet another role. He assumes the role of "servant", of one in need of a

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[100] See also Pitt-Rivers, note 85.

[101] See Bal (1997: 142-154). Bal employs the term *focalization* to refer to "the relations between elements presented and the vision through which they are presented"(p. 142). She makes an important distinction between "the vision through which the elements (of a fabula) are presented . . . and the identity of the voice that is verbalizing that vision . . . between those who see and those who speak"(p. 143). Within this analytic framework, the subject of focalization, or the agent who sees, is designated the *focalizer*. The focalizer may be a character within the narrative (character-bound-focalizer), the narrator (external focalizer), or the two might collapse into one another. Distinguishing between "who sees and who speaks" in Judges 19 allows us to better appreciate the sensitivity of the narrator to his subject.

benefactor.[102] What is more, he also places his concubine "at the disposal" of the old Ephraimite (literally so, as we shall see) by referring to her as "*your* maidservant" (לאמתך, v. 19). At the same time, however, the Levite is anxious to impress upon the old man that he can provide for himself and all those with him: his concubine, his servant boy, and his animals. In an instance of male posturing he makes the false assertion, "*We need nothing*"(v. 19). Unspoken is his need for shelter in the night – the very thing he cannot provide for himself.[103]

The old Ephraimite rightly interprets the situation and responds with generosity – a generosity that was not forthcoming from the native residents of Gibeah. We assume that because the old man and the Levite share a common place of origin, i.e. the hill country of Ephraim, the old man is predisposed to be hospitable to the Levite.[104] Perhaps as a *ger* or sojourner in Gibeah he is inclined to be sympathetic to the travellers' predicament. The old Ephraimite's status as a *ger* is significant to the story's development. Within the social fabric of Israel, as Fields observes, "a גר could be living *inside* a city, but sociologically remain *outside* of the local society."[105] Regardless of, or maybe because of, his marginalized status, the old man takes the Levite into his care with the words: "*Peace be with you. Leave all your needs to me, only do not spend the night in the open plaza.*" (v. 20). These words take on an ironic twist as the night deepens – particularly so for the nameless concubine.

When the elderly man ushers the travellers into his home we presume that the darkness and danger of the night are left outside – beyond the threshold of the door.

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[102]While the role the Levite assumes relates to the circumstances of the narrative, it also underscores the state of dependency of the Levites within the community of Israel.

[103] Comparison with Genesis 24 reveals that the scene played out between the Levite and the Ephraimite is a variation of a biblical *type-scene*, a distinctive feature of biblical narrative which I shall expand upon in short order.

[104] Levy (2000: 46) suggests the possibility that the Levite intentionally draws attention to his religious status by making reference to the "*house of the Lord*" (v. 18), and that he thereby exerts emotional and religious pressure on the old man to be hospitable towards him.

[105] Fields (1997: 90, n. 9).

Fields, in his analysis of the story, makes the observation that progressive time markers find counterparts in a progression of spatial locations.[106] The day lengthens, the sun begins to wane, and finally, sunset brings darkness over the land. At the same time, the travellers move from the open country of Israel, into a city belonging to Benjamin, then into the home of an Ephraimite sojourning in the city. While the progression of time markers suggests increasing danger, one assumes that this is mitigated by the progression in spatial markers. Already these assumptions have been disrupted by the account of the cool reception the Levite is given by the natives of Gibeah. But the narrative proceeds to disrupt our expectations even further – and it does so violently.

While the old Ephraimite is treating the Levite to exemplary hospitality within his home, we are confronted with the unexpected:

> 22. *They were making their hearts merry, when behold, the men of the city, sons of worthlessness [Belial], encircled the house and began beating upon the door. And they called to the man, the master of the house, saying, "Send out the man who came into your house that we may know him."*

With these words we become acutely aware that the narrative possesses echoes of another biblical story – the story of Sodom (cp. Gen 19). The terrible intentions of the rogues of Gibeah are cloaked in their demand to *yada'* (ידע), "to know" or "become acquainted with" the Levite. Our awareness of the story of Sodom alerts us, however, to the possibility that their intentions may be anything but friendly. The old Ephraimite's response to the men confirms these suspicions.

As our reading progresses, a disturbing biblical *type-scene* is graphically played out before our mind's eye. According to Alter the use of type-scenes is a "distinctively biblical literary convention".[107] In his discussion of repetition in biblical narrative he describes his interpretive approach to biblical type-scenes:

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[106] Fields (1997: 86).

[107] Alter (1981: 96).

> When . . . you are confronted with an extremely spare narrative, marked by formal symmetries, which exhibits a high degree of literal repetition, what you have to look for more frequently is the small but revealing differences in the seeming similarities, the nodes of emergent new meanings in the pattern or regular expectations created by explicit repetition.[108]

The intertextual allusion to Genesis 19 in Judges 19 makes our interpretive task all the more difficult.[109]. We must engage in a complex comparative reading. While a myriad of connections exist between our story and the rest of the biblical corpus, the tale demands that we make two fundamental comparisons: first, in that the narrative is structured in accordance with the principal of antithetical symmetry, we are compelled to observe the similarities and differences that exist between Part I and Part II; in addition to this, we must also explore the conscious intertextual allusions between our story and that of Lot in Sodom, a story which is in turn linked to the story of the

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[108] Alter (1981: 97). In his article, "Sodom as Nexus: The Web of Design in Biblical Narrative" (1994), Alter briefly examines the recurrence of the Sodom story in Judges 19.

[109] Lasine (1984) sees the dynamic between the two narrative units as one of 'one-sided' literary dependence. He claims, "Judges 19 presupposes the reader's awareness of Genesis 19 in its present form, and depends on that awareness in order to be properly understood." (p. 38). Though she is not as definitive on the subject as Lasine, Niditch (1982: 375-377) argues that Judges 19 is more likely the primary text. She claims that the narrative block that comprises Judges 19-20 is more integrated and complex than that which comprises Genesis 18-19 (contra. Alter [1994]), and suggests that this is indicative of the primacy of Judges 19. How the latter conclusion follows upon the former is a puzzle to me. One could easily argue that more complex tales are often based on simpler narrative frameworks, and for this reason it is difficult to concur with Niditch. I am, however, not so concerned with the question of which text came first. I am interested in the dynamic that exists between these two narrative units as they presently stand in the biblical corpus. I assume a continuous reading of the text from Genesis through Kings and an awareness on the reader's part of the themes and motifs that first find expression in the earlier narratives. While I have focused in this study on Judges 19 and afforded secondary attention to the Genesis narratives, the opposite is accomplished by Alter in his article, "Sodom as Nexus: The Web of Design in Biblical Narrative"(1994: 28-42).

visitation of the "men of God" to Abraham (Gen 18).[110] We must read Judges 19 both forward and backward to appreciate subtle and overt contrasts. The expectations we form on the basis of recurrent words, phrases, motifs, and events require constant revision, as the tale unfolds in unexpected ways.

When we look to Genesis 18 and 19 we see that prior to God's destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, he shares with Abraham his distress over the behavior of the people in the valley: "*How great is the outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah and how very grave their sin!*" (Gen. 18:20). Judges 19, on the other hand, gives us no forewarning that the city of Gibeah may be a place where terrible deeds are done. Everything to the contrary is suggested in the juxtaposition of Gibeah with Jebus. Even the initial inhospitable reception given the travellers by the native residents fails to prepare us for the overtly hostile behavior of the men in the dark. By taking the Levite into his home the old Ephraimite provides him and his company (as well as the reader) with a false sense of security. It is not to be found.

If we look to deeper structures of meaning in the text, we see that the insecurity of the Levite points to an all-pervasive insecurity that characterizes Israel as a whole. A series of concentric circles form around the person of the Levite relating to his status as a *ger*, or stranger: 1) he, as a *ger*, takes sanctuary, 2) in the home of a *ger*, 3) in a city of Benjaminites who are themselves *gerim* (גרים), 4) in the land of Canaan. The tribes of Israel live in a land they have not fully conquered. Despite the fact that the Israelites "ideologically" conceive of the land as "the Land of Israel", they continue to hold the status of *gerim* or strangers within it. There is a disjunction between Israel's self-concept and her actual status in Canaan. In our narrative the Levite's vulnerability and insecurity is emblematic of Israel's own vulnerability and insecurity in "the land". Put differently, the Levite's status in relation to Israel is mimetic of Israel's status in relation to Canaan – both are perpetual strangers in the land. As a consequence, a profound

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[110] The juxtaposition of hospitality and inhospitality in the two parts of Judges 19 also occurs between the two companion pieces of Genesis 18 and 19.

insecurity marks the collective character of Israel in the Book of Judges. Ironically, the behavior of the rogues of Gibeah reveals that the threat to Israel's security and wholeness lies not only without, but also *within* the nation of Israel.

Like the men of Sodom, the men of Gibeah surround the house of a sojourner who dares to play host in the confines of *their* city. The Genesis narrative emphasizes the fact that *every* man in the city of Sodom is involved in the attack: "*the men of the city, the men of Sodom, both young and old, all the people to the last man surrounded the house*" (Gen 19:4).[111] Though our narrative lacks these numerical qualifiers, the parallel between the two narratives suggests a comparable situation. Instead of describing the number of those involved, the narrator of Judges 19 describes the quality of their character: he labels them "sons of Belial", an appellation applied to those associated with depravity, treachery, inhospitality, and general wickedness (cp. Deut 13:13; I Sam 2:12, 25:17; I Kings 21:10,13; II Ch 13:7[MT]). In applying this label to the men of Gibeah, the narrator, for the first and only time in the narrative, employs direct characterization. While in this instance he makes a judgment statement about the quality of the men's collective character, in the rest of the narrative he calls upon the reader to assess the characters on the basis of their verbal and physical interactions.[112] Standing outside of the literary world, it is the reader who must *judge* the characters and the situations they are involved in. Hence, the act of reading becomes an exercise in moral discernment.[113]

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[111] The full extent of Sodom's depravity stands in relation to Abraham's *bargain* with God in the preceding narrative unit (Gen 18: 23-32): here God promises not to destroy Sodom if ten righteousness men can be found there. By means of repetition and merismus (both young and old) the narrator of Genesis 19 emphasizes the fact that there is *not one* righteous man in Sodom. Apparently the behavior of the women of Sodom has no bearing on the bargain. They share the fate of their menfolk.

[112] Bar-Efrat (1989: 64) observes that this indirect approach to characterization is most common in biblical narrative.

[113] I suspect this is one of the principal purposes of the Book of Judges. In its study of the nature of Evil it provides us a literary playground – albeit a dark and dangerous playground – in which to exercise moral discernment. See also Klein (1989: 146-147).

Like Lot, the old Ephraimite goes out of the door to "bargain" with the attackers:

> 23. *And the man went out to them, the master of the house, and he said to them, "No my brothers! Pray do not act so wickedly. Since this man has come into my house, do not do this wanton deed!* 24. *Look, here is my daughter – a virgin – and his concubine. Pray let me send them out and you can abuse them and do to them what is good in your eyes, but to this man do not do this wanton deed!"*

The words the old Ephraimite uses are strikingly similar to those used by Lot (cp. Gen 19: 7-8). Like Lot, he employs the vocative, "brothers", but in the context of Judges 19 the word carries more freight. Lot is speaking to Canaanites, not to his own kinsmen. Lot is relying on this familiar designation to evoke a feeling of camaraderie in the attackers. Though a *ger* in the city of Sodom, he seeks to be seen as one of the community, as one whose honour must be respected. Like Lot, the old Ephraimite is also a *ger*, but when he refers to the attackers as "brothers" he is addressing fellow Israelites. He appeals to a familial connection – the connection of the bloodline – in hopes of evoking even greater regard.[114]

Both hosts seek to impress upon the attackers that they are honour-bound to protect the guest(s) (and this would apparently mean "male guests of status") who have come into their homes. Both implore the attackers not to act wickedly (אל תרעו) (Gen 19:7; Judg 19:23). The old Ephraimite, however, is even more effusive in his condemnation of their intentions: twice he refers to the designs of the "sons of Belial" as *nebalah* (נבלה) (Judg 19:23, 24), or "wantonness". Anthony Phillips' examination of this term reveals that "*nebalah* is reserved for extreme acts of disorder or unruliness which themselves result in a dangerous breakdown in order, and the breakdown of an existing relationship."[115] In his condemnation of the intentions of the rogues, the old

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[114] The fact that the Benjaminites are kinsmen – brothers – becomes problematic for Israel in the succeeding chapters (cp. Judg 20:23, 28; 21:6).

[115] Phillips (1975: 238).

Ephraimite also expresses the attitude of the narrator to the situation. Bar-Efrat describes the relationship that exists between the characters in a given biblical narrative and the narrator: "Many of the views embodied in the narrative are expressed through the characters, and more specifically, through their speech and fate . . . the characters serve as the narrator's mouthpiece. . ." [116]

Just what is it that the narrative censures? The old man's response to the demand of the men in the dark affirms in our minds that they intend to *yada'*, or "know" the Levite in the carnal sense of the word. In other words, they intend to rape him. While an assault upon a guest is in itself violently inhospitable and worthy of condemnation, the sexual nature of the threat made by the men of Gibeah adds a dimension to the offense that must be considered.

The work of Ken Stone helps to illuminate the social dynamics at work in the text. Using anthropological studies of the Mediterranean and the Middle East to inform his reading, Stone examines the use of the motif of "homosexual rape" in Judges 19.[117] He endeavors to understand the *semiotics* of such an act, to discern just what it is that the men of Gibeah intend to communicate to the Levite.[118] He situates Judges 19 within the Mediterranean/Middle Eastern cultural matrix in which gender roles are sharply differentiated and the status of women is inferior to that of men.[119] Stone notes that within this matrix the sexual submission of a woman is signified in her penetration during sexual intercourse. Extending the gender-power nexus of heterosexual sex to homosexual sex within this cultural matrix, he argues that one partner in a homosexual relationship assumes the submissive position during intercourse – the role of the woman – and is thereby "feminized" or emasculated. Stone carries his argument further to suggest that, within the honour-shame complex of Mediterranean/Middle Eastern

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[116] Bar-Efrat (1989: 47).

[117] Stone, "Gender and Homosexuality in Judges 19: Subject-Honor, Object-Shame?" (1995: 87-107).

[118] Bal (1988: 157-158) also explores the semiotics of rape. She designates rape "the bodily speech-act *par excellence*".

[119] Stone (1995: 95-96).

society, the partner who is emasculated is put in a position of shame. He concludes "male homosexual contact serves metaphorically for other sorts of unequal male-male power relations".[120] To force a man through "homosexual rape" into the position of a woman is to challenge his masculinity and honour – is to shame him. Stone suggests that this is the intention of the rogues of Gibeah in their threatened assault upon the Levite.

Michael Carden challenges Stone's reading. He takes issue with Stone's language and assumptions and proposes a somewhat different reading of the text.[121] Carden argues that the phrase "homosexual rape" is inappropriately applied to the offence threatened in Genesis 19 and Judges 19, and furthermore, that its use is offensive to homosexually oriented readers. He suggests this term obscures the situation it is used to describe and serves to reinforce homophobic attitudes. Carden argues that the "evil" of Sodom is "the abuse of strangers", not "homosexuality", and that the Sodomites are guilty of xenophobic violence, not homosexual violence. Drawing on the work of Richie McMullen, Carden proposes that the threat levied against the male guests in both Sodom and Gibeah would be more accurately described by the term "male rape".[122] Like Stone he argues that the world of the Bible stands within the matrix of Mediterranean culture, but he contends that within this culture there is a phallocentric construction of male sexuality. He claims:

> . . . in this structure of male sexuality . . . heterosexuality (honour) of a man is not challenged by his buggering other men. It is, paradoxically, confirmed because male heterosexuality is defined by being the penetrator. Male homosexuality (shame) is

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[120] Stone (1995: 97).

[121] Carden, "Homophobia and Rape in Sodom and Gibeah: A Response to Ken Stone" (1999: 82-96).

[122] Carden (1999: 83-84). Though I appreciate the reasoning and intention behind this suggestion, the polyvalency of language renders the term somewhat ambiguous: out of context it is difficult to determine whether the word "male" refers to the victim or the perpetrator of rape; the subject-object positions are unclear.

confirmed by being buggered.[123]

Carden suggests, therefore, that males who rape males are not necessarily homosexuals, i.e. men who are homosexually oriented and enjoy homoeroticism. Rather, they may well be heterosexual males seeking to shame or humiliate a male victim by placing him in the position of a woman or "queer". To designate such behavior "homosexual rape" is to wrongfully incriminate homosexual men and mask the fact that the perpetrators of such crimes are oftentimes heterosexual men whose motives *are not* (homo)sexual.[124]

Stone's discussion underlines the semiotic intent of the *forced* buggery of males: the act serves to challenge the masculinity and honour of the victim by placing him in a position of submission. Through the sexual violence of forced buggery the perpetrator seeks to affirm his power and dominance over the victim. But, as Carden argues, one employs a misnomer by designating such an act "homosexual rape". This seems to be particularly true in the case of Judges 19. Given the context of the tale and the manner in which it unfolds, I am convinced that the attack of the Benjaminites of Gibeah on the Levite is not a homosexually motivated act. It is, instead, an instance of *heterosexual male posturing* – an act of territorialism and social dominance.[125] The Levite has infringed upon the territory of the Benjaminites of Gibeah and they are eager to *impress* this fact upon him.

Clearly semantics are a problem in discussions of this kind because the contemporary understanding of homosexuality extends beyond the "activity" of same-gendered sexual relations to include the "identity" or "orientation" of those engaged in

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[123] Carden (1999: 87).

[124] In making this distinction, Carden seeks to "detoxify Genesis 19 and Judges 19-21 as texts of terror for queer people" (1999: 85). Drawing on Trible's description of Judges 19-21 as a "text of terror" for women, Carden approaches it from the perspective of a homosexual male.

[125] I am indebted to my brother, Mark Wishart, for his intuitive understanding (for he is not a biblical scholar) of Judges 19. Upon hearing the tale, his immediate sense was that the men of Gibeah were behaving territorially. He saw the threatened rape of the Levite and the actual rape of the woman as instances of male posturing. See also Bal (1988: 157-158).

such relations. While I have argued that the men of Gibeah are unlikely to be "homosexual" in their orientation, we must still take seriously the biblical prohibitions against sexual intercourse between men (Lev 18:22; 20:13) and their implications for this particular narrative.

Susan Niditch, who also refers to the threatened assault as "homosexual rape", argues that it "de-orders" social interaction within Israelite society because, firstly, it is violently aggressive, and secondly, it transgresses socially appropriate (read hetero-sexual) sexual boundaries as prescribed by the culture. She concludes that in Judges 19, "The threat of homosexual rape is . . . a *doubly potent symbol* of acultural, non-civilized behavior from the Israelite point of view. It is an active, aggressive form of inhospitality."[126] In making her argument Niditch points to the biblical preoccupation with the right ordering of the cosmos and the human community, particularly the community of Israel. Fundamental to the biblical world-view are the principles of order and fertility. These principles are central to the account of creation and they are given expression time and again in biblical discourse through both positive and negative illustration. The prohibition, "*You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination*" (Lev 18:22), is situated in a long list of sexual transgressions that include incest, adultery, and bestiality (Lev 18). These behaviors are associated with the de-ordering of Israelite society; they are deemed "abominations"; and significantly, they are *associated with the behavior of Canaanites* (Lev 18:3,24-28).

If we interpret the threat of the men of Gibeah in light of Leviticus 18, recognizing that Israel's code of ethics/holiness is established in contradistinction to that associated with Canaan, we realize that Judges 19 is more than a story about a violent breach of hospitality within the nation of Israel; Israel is being represented as having adopted the ways of the paradigmatic Other – the ways of Canaan! These *ways* are understood to be antonymic to the creative purposes of YHWH, and are symbolically exemplified in the sterile nature of the same-sex intercourse threatened in both Sodom and Gibeah. Hence, within the broader thematics of the ongoing biblical narrative, the sexual nature of the

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[126] Niditch (1982: 369) (emphasis mine).

threat levied in Genesis 19 and Judges 19 is indeed pertinent.[127] The story of the Levite and his concubine represents the re-emergence of the "Vine of Sodom" (cp. Deut 32:32) *in Israel*. In this, the dramatic irony of the Levite's decision to turn away from Jebus (a Canaanite city) to seek hospitality amongst his brethren is accentuated.

The serious implications of the behavior of the men of Gibeah cannot be understated. As Israel's ethical/holy character is compromised by their behavior, so too is her place in "the land", for we read: " *you shall keep my statutes and my ordinances and commit none of these abominations . . . otherwise the land will vomit you out for defiling it, as it vomited out the nation that was before you*" (Lev 18: 26-28) (cp. Lev 20:22-26). *Nebalah* (נבלה) on the part of Israel endangers Israel's *naḥalah* (נחלה).

While these implications are serious enough in themselves, the threat posed by the rogues of Gibeah bears still further significance. Their intended victim is not only a "stranger in their gates", a male, and a fellow Israelite – he is also a Levite. As a guardian of the *Torah* in Israel, any attack upon his person is a pointed attack upon Levitical authority and the Law of God in the land (cp. Deut 33:8-11). Furthermore, like the two men of God who visited Sodom, the Levite is representative of the Holy One of Israel. Accompanying his presence is the presence of the LORD. Is this Presence seen to be a threat in a place such as Gibeah? By attempting to rape the Levite do the men of Gibeah seek to communicate that the Holy has no place in their midst? Do they hope to force the Holy into submission and thereby mitigate the power of the Holy One of Israel in their lives?[128] We can only guess at the motives of the men, but *in effect*, their threat is an assault upon God!

Given the serious implications of the intentions of the men of Gibeah it is no wonder

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[127] Contra Boyarin (1995: 349-54), who, like Carden, argues that the text condemns the inhospitable violence of the men of Sodom and Gibeah and not the "homosexual" nature of that violence.

[128] Greenberg (1988) notes that in an Egyptian coffin text from the Heracleopolitan Period (Ninth and Tenth dynasties) a reference to the god Atum reads: "Atum has no power over me, for I copulate between his buttocks." Commenting on the text Greenberg suggests, "he who can force a god to submit to him sexually has nothing to fear from him." (p. 130).

that the old Ephraimite is so strong in his condemnation! It is no wonder that he employs the word *nebalah*! But though the old Ephraimite and Lot both describe the intentions of the attackers as "wicked", or "wanton", in the same breath they themselves proceed to propose the *unspeakable*: they "bargain" with the attackers and offer the nubile women within their homes as substitutes for the guests they are "honour-bound" to protect! In both instances the hosts allow the code of hospitality to override their paternal responsibilities. Their offers are a perverse form of "self-sacrifice", for the identity of the daughters is an extension of that of their fathers. However, the old Ephraimite's offer of the Levite's concubine seems to be a breach of the code of hospitality. He offers what is not his to offer – the woman of another man.

Stuart Lasine examines the two stories and makes the assertion that "Judges 19 presupposes the reader's awareness of Genesis 19 in its present form, and depends on that awareness in order to be properly understood."[129] He suggests that the intentional contrast between the two narratives is a means by which characterization is accomplished in the Judges account. He argues that hospitality is demonstrated *in the extreme* by Lot when he offers his two virgin daughters to the men of Sodom, and that in contrast, the old Ephraimite of Judges 19 is shown to be *inhospitable* by presuming to offer the concubine of his guest to the rogues of Gibeah. According to Lasine, the behavior of the host in Gibeah intentionally copies the hospitality shown by Lot, but his behavior is inverted into inhospitality in order to illustrate the "topsy-turvy" state of affairs in Gibeah.[130]

Lasine's argument is not entirely convincing. While there is indeed a contrast in circumstances between the two narratives, I am not sure the narrator's intention is to suggest one host is better than the other. The old Ephraimite definitely presents as a good host prior to the attack, and given different circumstances, he, like Lot, contrives a terrible solution to a terrible predicament. The solutions of both hosts are essentially "anti-solutions". Confronted with one evil, they propose another. To preserve the

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[129] Lasine (1984: 38). See note 109.

[130] Lasine (1984: 38-41). See also Klein (1989: 172).

sanctity of their homes, and a measure of their own honour as well as that of their "primary guests", the hosts compromise the sanctity of the bodies and lives of the young women in their homes. By offering the women in the place of the men the hosts seek to mitigate an offence they have no hope of averting. The substitutions they propose give clear indication of the social priority of males, as well as that of guests, in Israelite society.[131] Evidently this social priority was to be preserved even at a terrible cost. In their predicament we see Lot and the old Ephraimite confronted with the kind of "choiceless choices" that are demanded of individuals in situations of danger and death, situations that impose "impossible decisions on victims not free to embrace the luxury of the heroic life."[132]

Lawrence Langer examines the "choiceless choices" made by countless Jews who suffered life and death in the ghettoes and death camps of Nazi Germany. He observes that the threat of death in Auschwitz:

> . . . created a situation beyond good and evil that even Nietzsche could not imagine. How are we to portray or apply ethical measures to that prototypical example of *choiceless choice*, the mother of three children who reputedly was told by the Nazis that she might save *one* of them from execution? She was free to "choose," but what

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[131] Neither the old Ephraimite nor the Levite offer the servant boy as a substitute victim even though he would seem to be a more "equivalent" alternate. Clearly a male-upon-male sexual assault is viewed as more grievous than the sexual assault of a woman, whether she is a virgin or one who has "lain with a male".

[132] Langer (1989: 231). In "Am I a Murderer? Judges 19-21 as a Parable of Meaningless Suffering," (2000), Katharina von Kellenbach provides a "post-Holocaust" reading of Judges 19. She considers the story to be a story of meaningless suffering. Like the Holocaust, the events recounted in Judges 19 refuse to be drawn into "grand theological narratives of redemption"(p. 191). Von Kellenbach draws on the work of Lawrence Langer to explicate the behavior of the Levite in Judges 19: his decision to give his concubine over to the rogues of Gibeah, and his non-response to her broken body in the morning. Though her insights pertain to the behavior of the Levite (which I shall consider forthwith), they are also relevant to our understanding of the behavior of Lot and the old Ephraimite.

civilized mind could consider this an exercise of moral choice . . .? [133]

Into the individual circumstances of the characters that populate the story of Judges 19 we can read the individual circumstances of innumerable, nameless Jews who were brutalized by and co-opted into the violence that was Nazi Germany. In our tale, however, the identity of perpetrator and victim merge in the person of Israel. Judges 19 is a parable that allows us to stare into "the heart of darkness", like the darkness of the Holocaust, to see the shape of evil and the moral compromises it engenders. Like "the vine of Sodom which yields grapes of poison and clusters of bitterness" (cp. Deut 32:32), the events of Judges 19 lead to a cycle of violence and moral compromise which threatens the nation of Israel with self-destruction. Given the contingencies of human existence, the "path of righteousness" is difficult to navigate.

The old Ephraimite's "invitation" to the men to do to the women "what is right in their own eyes" echoes the introduction and the conclusion of the coda (cp Judg 17:6; 21:25). The echo at this juncture underlines the fact that, at this time "*when there was no king in Israel*", what is deemed "right in the eyes of the people of Israel" is often-times monstrous. Even those who seek to mitigate the harm of a threatening situation perpetrate evil and compromise the well being of the innocent.

In both Sodom and Gibeah the attackers are not dissuaded from their original purpose. They are not interested in the women. The men of Sodom press in on Lot, and the men of Gibeah do not listen to the old Ephraimite (cp. Gen 19:9 and Judg 19:25). At this point in the Judges narrative, however, there is a radical departure from the storyline established in Genesis 19. In the Genesis account the "men of God" reach out into the dark to draw Lot back into the safety of his house; in the Judges account the Levite, as husband and master of the concubine, exercises his "right of disposal" over her and casts her out to the men in the dark.[134]

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[133] Langer (1989: 228) (emphasis mine).

[134] See note 83 concerning the inversion of positions held by the man and the woman in relation to Part I of

25. *But the men were not willing to listen to (the old man). So the man seized his concubine and cast (her) out to them. And they knew her and they abused her all the night until morning, and they let her go at the coming of dawn.*

Katherina von Kellenbach argues that the Levite must make a choice *in extremis*, a "choiceless choice", to save his own life and preserve a measure of his honour and that of his host.[135] He cannot completely avoid victimization in the assault; he can only mitigate its effects. Though a victim himself, in sacrificing his concubine to the mob the Levite becomes a collaborator. The circumstances in Gibeah put him in a moral and psychologically torturous bind. Though his choice is cowardly and contemptible, von Kellenbach's reading of the situation discourages us from vilifying his character. In the moral compromises he makes, the Levite, like so many others in similar situations, is sadly human.

But what of the woman?! In the Genesis narrative the men of Sodom are struck blind by the "men of God" and their hands grope blindly at the walls of the house; in Gibeah we imagine the hands of the men groping wildly at the body of the concubine. She is accepted as a substitute for the Levite because the men of Gibeah are not interested in homosexual intercourse – they are seeking to humiliate the Levite and demonstrate their dominance over him. In the semiotics of sexuality, they accomplish this *indirectly* through the rape of *his* woman.[136] In neither of the tales are the daughters accepted, for it is the guests who are targeted in the attacks, not the hosts.[137]

The concubine's virtual invisibility in the narrative to this point makes her sudden exposure to the mob all the more startling and dramatic – suddenly she stands in all her vulnerability before the angry and predatory eyes of a horde of men. We become

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the narrative.

[135] Von Kellenbach (2000: 181).

[136] See also Stone (1995: 100-101). A similar dynamic is at work in II Sam 16:21-22 when Absalom "goes in to" his father's concubines, as well as in I Kings 2:12-25 when Adonijah threatens Solomon's "power" by seeking to make Abishag the Shunammite, who belonged to their father's harem, his wife.

[137] See also Carden (1999: 91-92).

hyper-conscious of her presence, her femininity, and her terrible isolation in a space occupied by aggressive males. But even though she is foregrounded as the "object" of violence in the narrative, in semiotic terms her person is still invisible. The primary target of the attack is the Levite. She is an extension of him – a conduit through which an assault upon him can be accomplished.

While women figure prominently in Judges, it could be argued that the narrative is essentially about brothers and boundaries. In biblical discourse sexual boundaries frequently serve as metonyms for social and intertribal boundaries. This is apparent when sexual boundaries are crossed both positively and negatively: the sexual union of marriage either affirms or results in intertribal alliances (Gen 24:3-4; 28:1-5; Judg 1:11-15; 14; 19); while the transgression of sexual boundaries through rape is shown to result in internecine war (Gen 34; Judg 19-21; II Sam 13). Sexual conquest is equated with military conquest; it signifies an attack upon familial or tribal boundaries. In other words, in addition to its biological or reproductive value, a woman's sexuality has symbolic value; her genitals are the "doorway" through which her man and her community are made vulnerable. As a result, it is not so much the violence done to the person of the woman that motivates the ensuing cycle of retributive violence in Israel (chapters 20-21), it is the transgression of marital and intertribal boundaries symbolically accomplished through her rape. The foregrounding of the unnamed woman in Judges 19 makes it painfully evident that conflict between men is frequently fought across and through the bodies of women.

Beyond its social significance, the rape of the concubine has further semiotic significance. While she is a conduit through which symbolic contact is made with the Levite (cp. Lev 18:16), the Levite, as noted earlier, is a conduit through which the people of Israel make contact with God. Within this symbolic system of relations the assault upon the woman is not only an assault upon her husband/master, it is also an assault upon God. Through her vulnerability, God is made vulnerable.

A perverse irony links our tale with the rest of the book of Judges. This irony is built on the text's manipulation of the Hebrew word *yada'* which can mean, "to know", or "to know carnally" through consensual or forced sexual intercourse. As noted

earlier, the Book of Judges repeatedly figures Israel as a "harlot", as a nation that fornicates against *her* LORD by "lusting after other gods" (Judg 2:11-13,17; 3:7; 8:27, 33-34; 10:6, 10, 13-14; 17:5; 18:30). Israel's harlotry is related to her failure to "know" God, her failure to keep God's statutes and live in righteousness (cp. Hosea 4:1-2). But in Judges 19, the rogues of Gibeah come to "know" the woman, and by extension, also God; they come to "know" God, however, in the violence of rape. Transgression of the sexual boundaries of the woman is ultimately a transgression of the boundaries of the sacred. In the darkness of the night, in the heart of the land, Evil seeks to mark its territory, defile the sacred, and overpower the "Holiness of God".

In her discussion of rape narratives in Hebrew scripture Keefe makes the comment: "It is the sacrality of woman's body as the source and matrix of the life of Israel which undergirds the power of rape as a rhetorical device in these narratives."[138] In Judges 19 sexual intercourse with the woman is oriented not to reproduction, but to destruction: the destruction of her person, the destruction of intertribal, communal relations, and the destruction of relations with the Holy One of Israel. The covenant and covenantal community are ruptured through the violence of the rape in Gibeah. That which God has established is undone. In other words, the actions of the sons of Belial are *de-creative* rather than pro-creative: the seeds they sow in the woman's body – a "field for plowing" – are the seeds of destruction and Chaos.[139] Their "knowing" of the

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[138]Keefe (1993: 89).

[139] Rousseau recognizes the inversion of the process of creation in Judges 19 in his retelling of the story, "Le Lévite d'Ephraïm". In contradistinction to the dispassionate voice of the biblical narrator the narrator of Rousseau's tale laments, "O miserable men, who destroy your species through the pleasures meant to reproduce it . . . " (*Confessions* II, 1214-5 cited in Kamuf, 204). Kamuf explores Rousseau's retelling of the story of Judges 19-21 in her article "Author of a Crime" (1993). For Rousseau the retelling of the story was a "flight into writing", a means by which he worked out a personal crisis in his life, one in which he was betrayed by a "friend" and by a system of law which he presumed protected him. Kamuf's study provides us with a sense of Rousseau's own interpretive genius, but more importantly for the purposes of this study, she offers profound insights into the biblical story itself – insights which I shall draw upon later in my discussion of the text.

woman is a kind of "unknowing", an undoing of God's purposes in creation and history. [140]

The narrator does not use the language of poetry to describe the horror of the woman's experience (cp. Isa 47:1-3; Jer 13:20-27; Lam 1:8-10; Mic 4:11; Nah 3:5-6), instead the horror is muted in a laconic description: *and they knew her and they abused her all the night until morning, and they let her go at the coming of dawn* (v. 25). The account of the event seems to understate its violence. But the disjunction between the mode of expression and its content arrests our attention. Whereas previously the narrator marked the gradual progression of time over a number of verses, here the narrator collapses the woman's long night of terror into *one* verse. Despite the narrator's economy of words, the duration of her experience is given emphasis in the complex time description; furthermore the repeated nature of the abuse is expressed in the iterative formulation of the verb *alal,* here rendered *va'yittallelu* (ויתעללו), which means, "to act severely toward or ruthlessly abuse". [141] Furthermore, the absence of descriptive detail creates a "gap" that opens the text to our imagination; and we can

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[140] Contra Bal who attempts to fit Part II of Judges 19 into her thesis that the narrative represents an inter-institutional struggle between patrilocal nomadic marriage and virilocal residential marriage. She claims that the threatened rape of the Levite, and the actual rape of the concubine, is a "punishment" inflicted upon the Levite for challenging the existing institution of sexual relations, i.e. patrilocal marriage, by reclaiming his "wife"(1988: 156-158). See note 58.

Also contra Exum who argues that the underlying androcentric interests of the narrative demand that the woman be punished for her initial act of autonomy, i.e. her fornication against her husband or departure from him (v. 2). She claims: "By daring to act autonomously in the first place, Bath-Sheber puts herself beyond male protection, and for this she must be punished. The men who ordinarily would be expected to protect her – her husband and their host – participate in her punishment because her act is an offense against the social order, that is against the patriarchal system itself." (1993: 179).

Rather than understanding the violation of the woman as a form of punishment, I see it as a symbolic transgression of both social and sacral boundaries. It signifies a rupture in relations between Israelites and between Israel and YHWH.

[141] Brown, Driver & Briggs (1979: 759).

imagine the worst. In not knowing the details we can envision all forms of sexual violence, the humiliation and the pain; and, as we witness the crime through our mind's eye, we are ever mindful of the fact that the doors of the houses of Gibeah, like the eyes of those who inhabit them, are closed to the horror in the street. In the Sodom narrative the "men of God" strike the men in the street blind; in Judges 19, all those who occupy the safety of interior space turn a blind eye to the plight of the unnamed woman. Most notably, the door behind which her husband/master lies remains shut. *We* are the witnesses of the rape of the concubine. The narrator's reticence invites *us* to be the "focalizers" (along with him) of the scene. We see before us what "evil is done in the eyes of the LORD."

Only dawn comes to deliver the woman from her ordeal:

> 26. *And the woman came as the morning dawned and fell down at the door of the man's house where her master was, until it was light.* 27. *And her master got up in the morning and opened the doors of the house, and he went out to go on his way; and behold, the woman, his concubine, lay fallen at the door of the house, with her hands upon the threshold.*

The light of morning lays bare the crime of the night.[142] At the liminal time of day that is dawn, the narrator presents us with the remarkable and tragic image of the woman lying broken at the door of the old Ephraimite. Her hands rest lifeless (?) upon the threshold of the door, that liminal space which supposedly separates a place of safety – the inside of a home – from a place of danger – the street. The liminality of time and space correspond. A similar correspondence of time and space occurs earlier in the narrative when the Levite and his entourage enter the city of Gibeah: at the liminal time of dusk they stand at the gates of the city – a liminal space which supposedly separates

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[142] Fields (1997: 110-111) makes the observation: "The expressions denoting the progression from full light to full darkness in Judg. 19.8-14 have their counterparts in the expressions denoting the progression from full darkness to full light in Judg. 19.25-26."

travellers from the dangers of the open country and holds the promise of hospitality within. The Levite comes at dusk seeking kindness, generosity, and protection from his brethren; the concubine comes at dawn seeking protection and consolation from her husband/master. Yet, in Gibeah, the promise of safety assumed to lie within the walls of the city and behind the door of a home proves to be illusory.

Given the brief description of the woman's rape in the night, the detailing of her pathetic state in the morning is surprising. Most pathetic of all is the description of her hands on the threshold. This tiny detail is painfully powerful. Like the few plaintive notes of the oboe that sound amidst the rushing tide of the first movement of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, the detail arrests our attention and wrenches at our hearts. The image created by the author elicits our sympathy and draws us to the side of the woman. Is she dead? We do not know, for the text (MT) is not conclusive on this matter.[143] Not only is the time and space she occupies at this point in the narrative liminal, so too is her existence – it lies somewhere between life and death. Bal makes a disturbing observation: "As her death begins at her exposure and ends with her dismemberment, we cannot know when exactly she dies . . . She dies several times, or rather, she never stops dying."[144]

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[143] The Septuagint does not allow the ambiguity of the MT. It adds the explanatory note, "*for she was dead.*"

[144] Bal (1993: 222). In "A Body of Writing: Judges 19" (1993:208-230) Bal examines a fascinating drawing by Rembrandt entitled, *The Levite Finds his Wife in the Morning* (Fig. 2). She focuses her attention on the right hand of the prostrate woman and sees in its representation, movement. She argues that movement is suggested in the lines drawn under the hand, and that this movement captures the "durative" nature of the woman's dying, the "endless deferral of death" (p. 223).

Bal's "reading" of the drawing is interesting to consider, but ironically it may be a "mis-reading" (Bal's article examines the semiotics of body language and the possibility of "mis-reading" or "mis-seeing" signs). The lines that Bal associates with movement may in fact be shadows, a possibility she considers but dismisses. Rembrandt's work, however, is known for its treatment of light. In his drawing, the shadow marked beneath the woman's hand corresponds to that cast by the curve of her fallen body, and to that cast by the Levite who stands directly above her. Perhaps Rembrandt was endeavoring to represent the shadows of dawn, that liminal time of day that exposes the crime of the night.

By detailing the condition of the woman in the morning the storyteller does not allow us to give her scant attention. He compels us to "look" at her condition and to empathize with her. The feelings the storyteller evokes in the reader contrast sharply with those exhibited by the Levite who opens the doors in the morning "*to go on his way*". By opening the doors that were shut and "blind" at night, vision is made possible. While in verse 26 the narrator is the agent of focalization, in verse 27, with the word *Hinneh*, "Behold", the Levite becomes the one who "sees". Before him lies the spectacle of the broken woman already presented to the reader.

In her brokenness the woman "speaks" to her husband/master. Though voiceless and motionless she assumes a "subject" position within the narrative; she speaks through her body – through her hands. Not only does the detail of the placement of her hands have emotive value in the text, it also has semiotic significance. Bal considers the woman's placement of her hands on the threshold to be her "final, powerless act of

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What is intriguing about Rembrandt's representation is the posture of the woman. My reading of the text leaves me with an image of the woman lying prone, or face down at the doorway with her arms stretched out (parallel to each other) along the ground, her hands reaching for and resting upon the threshold. In Rembrandt's drawing the woman's prostrate figure is turned over in a supine position. She lies against the steps of the house, steps that form a horizontal line within the composition. Her arms fall lifelessly (?) to either side of her body; her head is tilted and turned pathetically to the side; her legs lie in the street, twisted to the right. In many ways her posture resembles that of a *crucifix image*. In fact, the overall composition of the drawing is that of an inverted cross: our eyes are led into the drawing vertically at the point where the woman's feet lie at the bottom of the drawing, then up to her hips and arms which join with the steps to create a horizontal line across the main vertical line of the composition; this vertical line directs our eyes up toward her head, and still further up to the figure of the Levite who stands above her.

Rembrandt's representation of the Levite is also intriguing. The Levite appears aghast at the sight before his eyes: his mouth is slightly open in shock and he wrings his hands in anguish. Rembrandt imputes more sympathetic feeling to the Levite than the narrative actually suggests. Does this representation reflect Rembrandt's understanding of the Levite's character, or does he depict the Levite in a manner that expresses his own horror at the scene presented in the text of Judges 19?

[This page has been removed due to copyright restrictions. The image removed was **Figure 2: Rembrandt, *The Levite Finds his Wife in the Morning*, 1655/56, Kupferstechkabennett Museum, Berlin**. It can be found in: Mieke Bal, "A Body of Writing: Judges 19", in Athalya Brenner (ed.), *A Feminist Companion to Judges* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), pp. 208-230, see p. 222]

body-speech"; she uses them to "both accuse and implore".[145] Significantly, it is the Levite who "sees" this detail in the narrative, for it is to him that the speech-act is directed. Through her body language the woman confronts her husband with his betrayal of her and his failure to provide her protection – the protection associated with the interior of a home; she also implores (or did implore) those who lie on the other side of the closed door to come to her aide and give her comfort. In laying her hands upon the threshold she "signs" to her "Lord", "You are my refuge"; but in her dying, her hands sign the betrayal of that assumption.[146]

The Levite is seemingly unmoved by the vision he sees before him. He issues the command, "*Get up and let us be going*"(v. 28). It is the first time in the narrative that his speech to the woman is recorded. The heartlessness of his words is completely at odds with his intention earlier in the narrative to "*speak to her heart*"(v. 3). Her speech-act comes from below, his from above.[147] From her prostrate position she implores him to lower himself and attend to her needs, from his elevated position he commands her to raise herself and conform to his "agenda". The scene intensifies our awareness of the woman's subordination in the relationship. Her needs are not considered.

After the sensitive presentation of the woman in verses 26 and 27, the Levite's words to her have a shock effect upon the reader. His words are a "non-response"; he fails to relate appropriately to the woman's body language. Von Kellenbach offers a more sympathetic appraisal of the Levite's "non-response". She likens him to the Jewish ghetto policeman, Calel Perechodnik, who was "forced" to load his own wife and daughter onto a cattlecar bound for the deathcamp, Treblinka. Von Kellenbach imagines the psychological effect of such an act:

> The abandonment of the other has irrevocable and shattering effects on the self. Can

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[145] Bal (1988: 156-157).

[146] In verses 26 and 27 the Levite is specifically referred to as "her Lord" (אֲדֹנֶיהָ).

[147] See Bal (1988: 156).

> we detect similar destructive outcomes in the life of the Levite in Judges? Like Perechodnik, the Levite secures his own survival . . . by handing over his concubine to be 'ravished' (Judg. 20.5), thus abandoning her. But he is forced to listen to her violation throughout the night, unable to intervene, powerless to protect her. In the morning, like Perechodnik at the station, the Levite cannot look at his concubine. The striking absence of empathy the morning after the deadly rape should perhaps not be attributed to the Levite's patriarchal attitudes or to feelings of male supremacy but rather to his victimization and powerlessness. How could the Levite inquire how she is feeling? His shame and guilt, one may presume, go too deep. Her agony is forever tied to his cowardice and emasculation. . . . The Levite turns away, unable to relate emotionally to this dying or dead woman. . . . The Levite cannot mourn the concubine's death without admitting his guilt and igniting self-contempt.[148]

Recognizing her condition of brokenness would be to recognize his complicity in the crime. Perhaps, for him, this is a greater horror than the crime itself.

The Levite's attitude may mask his own self-abasement, but his callousness underlines the sensitivity of the narrator's presentation. While the Levite maintains an attitude of indifference to her, the narrator calls upon us to identify with her. He draws us with him to the side of this unnamed daughter of Israel, and as a result we are shaken and perplexed by the Levite's response.[149] When she does not answer, an aural void is

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[148] Von Kellenbach (2000: 184-185).

[149] Contra Lasine (1984: 45) who argues: "The absurdity of (the Levite's words to her) is so great that the reader is forced to view the scene with detachment, which in turn prevents the reader from indulging in 'tragic' pity for the plight of the concubine". Also contra Trible (1984: 80) who insists: "Of all the characters in scripture, she is the least. Appearing at the beginning and close of a story that rapes her, she is alone in a world of men. Neither the other characters *nor the narrator* recognizes her humanity. She is property, object, tool and literary device" (emphasis mine). Bal (1988: 160) makes the grudging observation: "That the story takes over and speaks for her seems to show that there is some awareness of her humanity."

created in the text – silence – a silence that suggests death (v. 28). But is she dead, or just speech-less?[150] Her voiceless presence persists.

[150] Levy (2000) suggests that the woman's narrative silence in the story as a whole enhances the dramatic effect of her failure to respond to the Levite's command.

CHAPTER V: DAUGHTER ISRAEL – ONE DIVIDED

> 28b. *Then he put her upon an ass and the man rose up to go to his place.* 29. *When he came to his house he took the knife and seized his concubine and divided her together with her bones, into twelve pieces, and he sent her throughout the territory of Israel.*

No one detains the Levite when he sets off in the morning to complete the final stretch of his journey to Ephraim. One of his asses bears the body of the woman he reclaimed only to betray. The narrator's earlier attention to the gradual progression of time is now absent. Instead, one act follows another in rapid succession. As he seized (וַיַּחֲזֵק, v. 25) his concubine to put her out to the men of Gibeah, the Levite now seizes (וַיַּחֲזֵק, v. 29) her to cut her into pieces for dispersal to all Israel. Her body is violated, penetrated, in life and in death. Though the narrator's brief description is horrific in itself, our imaginations once again fill in the details of the scene. We visualize the systematic dismembering of the woman with "*the knife*" (הַמַּאֲכֶלֶת), the cutting of her into twelve parts: would they be her hands, her arms, her feet, her legs, her breasts, her torso, her head, with its lips – silent?[151] Would not her blood pour out upon the ground like that of a slaughtered animal?

The Levite completes his gruesome task and parcels out the body parts of the woman to all Israel. Bal observes that once again the woman's body is put to semiotic use. This time, however, it is put to use by the woman's husband.[152] Rather than using

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[151] Rendered a burnt offering, the body of Jephthah's daughter (Judg 11:30-31, 39; cp. Exod 29:15-18) is likely subjected to a dismemberment similar to that of the concubine/daughter, and to fire like that which consumes the body of the Timnite's daughter (Judg 15:6). These three unnamed women of Judges are linked to one another in their anonymity, their social status as daughters, and in the violence done to their bodies.

[152] Bal (1988: 157).

a *shofar* (horn) to muster the tribes of Israel as did the Judges in the preceding narratives, the Levite uses the body of his concubine "as language" to effect the same end (cp. Judg 3:27; 6:34; also I Sam 11:7). Through her dismemberment, the Levite externalizes the internal violence perpetrated against her body by the rapists in Gibeah. He reveals her wounds – and his own victimization through her – to all of Israel. In Gibeah his concubine became every man's, and the Levite gives concrete expression to this fact by parceling out bits and pieces of her anatomy to all Israel. Bal describes the contiguity between the rape in Gibeah and the Levite's bloody summons: "Scattering the (woman's) body throughout the land is another way of speaking rape: of symbolizing her body as every-body's through wounding it from within and from without."[153] The violence of his "summons" speaks the violence done to *his* woman by the men of Gibeah, it speaks the violence done *to him* through the body of his woman, and it speaks the violence he demands in retribution for the crime. Might we read into his "speech act" an echo of the words of Adam who, when he beheld Woman, said, "*This now is bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh*" (Genesis 2:23)?

At an essential level, the woman's bleeding members also speak metonymically of the vulnerability and victimization of *women* in Israelite society; she is Every Daughter, Every Wife. Her ordeal presages that of innumerable Israelite women who are murdered and raped by their own brethren in the civil war to follow (cp. Judg 20:37,48; 21:10-12, 23). These nameless women are generally accounted for only as "collateral damage" in the biblical chronicles of wars between men, but the story of the concubine brings their private experience into view.

Within the deeper structures of meaning in the text, the woman's body – divided and scattered in Israel – also "speaks" symbolically and graphically of a serious rupture in the social cohesion of the community. This rupture is effected by the terrible mistreatment of the Levite and his concubine by their brethren in Gibeah. In her

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[153] Bal (1988: 160).

dismemberment into twelve parts the woman's body is identified with the "body politic" of the nation – the twelve tribes of Israel.[154] She becomes a symbolic representation of the nation – a nation divided against itself. Her body figures the social disintegration acted out in Gibeah through her rape and it pre-figures the bloody civil war that ensues; it represents that which has gone before as well as that which is to come. The horrific image of her dismembered body is, therefore, a pivot point in the narrative complex of Judges 19-21; it is the point at which the private story of a man and a woman becomes the story of a whole people. Keefe has the following insight:

> The dismembered body of the concubine stands contiguous with the civil war, a metonym for a bloody and divided Israel. The point of the war narrative emerges as it is refracted through the image of the woman's tortured and broken body, so that the rape becomes the interpretive key for assessing the meaning of Israel's internecine violence. Rape, which marks not only the beginning, but also the end of this final narrative in Judges, frames the civil war in images which expose the reality of such a war as the brokenness of the body and life of the Israelite community.[155]

Any analysis of Judges 19 must, therefore, take into consideration the events that follow the Levite's summons, the events recounted in Judges 20-21. An extended analysis reveals the narrative to be a complex study of crime and punishment in Israel. As we observe Israel's attempts to rectify the wrong done in Gibeah, we see her engaged in an

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[154] See Keefe, "The Female Body, the Body Politic and the Land: A Sociopolitical Reading of Hosea 1-2" (1995: esp. 89-100). Also Niditch (1982: 371). Contra Soggin (1981: 282) who compares the Levite's summons with that of Saul (I Sam 11:9) and finds the "macabre gesture" of the Levite unnecessary and lacking in symbolic effectiveness. He argues that Saul's summons coupled with his words make the symbolism of the act obvious, "woe to those who do not respond". If, however, we consider the Levite's summons in relation to subsequent events, we see that disaster does befall those who do not respond to his summons: the Benjaminites and the people of Jabesh-gilead.

[155] Keefe (1993: 86).

act of self-mutilation.

Paradoxically, in distributing the body parts of the woman to all of Israel the Levite seeks to draw the body politic *together as one*. He calls upon Israel to be an "*Avenger of Blood*", to "*purge the guilt of innocent blood from Israel*" (cp. Num 35: 19, 33-34, Judg 20:13). The Levite elicits the desired response in those who receive the "parcels" of flesh. They are aghast!

> 30. *And so it was that all those who saw (it) said, "Never has anything like this been done or seen since the day the children of Israel came up from the land of Egypt until this day! Consider it, take counsel, and speak out!"*

As yet, the Israelites are uninformed as to the reason behind such an outrageous "parcel". Their response is an expression of horror at receiving the body parts of a human being – apparently an unprecedented event in the Promised Land. For the reader, however, their words are applicable to more than the macabre spectacle of bits and pieces of the woman's anatomy. They are applied retrospectively to the entire sequence of events that lead up to the disbursal of her members: to the gruesome scene of the concubine's dismemberment at the hands of her own husband, to her rape by a mob, to her betrayal by her husband, to the threat of buggery made against the Levite by the men of Gibeah, and to their cold inhospitality toward him when he and his company came seeking sanctuary in the night . . . and all *this* because the Levite wrongly presumed that he would receive hospitality in a city belonging to "*the children of Israel*", hospitality like that which he had received in Bethlehem!

Reference by the Israelites to "*the day the children of Israel came up from the land of Egypt*" communicates their sense of shared community and shared experience. The Israelites draw on a collective memory: they are a covenantal community, a community chosen by God and delivered from the darkness of oppression in Egypt by

God's hand. The bloody members of a woman's body confront the Israelites with the possibility that a violation of covenantal law and covenantal community has occurred – a violation of extreme proportions!

In the Israelites' declaration of horror, the narrator subtly reminds us that the violation of the law and the community has involved *the person of a woman*. Trible notes the manner in which this is accomplished:

> . . . the declaration in Hebrew contains a nuance that English translations cannot preserve. The verbal forms and the object are all feminine gender. Hebrew has no neuter. The feminine gender can accent the woman herself, not just this abstract or collective "thing" that has happened. Literally, we may translate, "And all who saw *her* said, "*She* was not, and *she* was not seen such as this from the day that the people came up out of the land of Egypt until this day.'" In other words, the ambiguity of the grammatical forms serves a particular hermeneutical emphasis: to highlight the woman who is the victim of terror.[156]

When the Israelites call upon each other to "*consider the situation, take counsel, and speak out*", the voice of the narrator merges with the unanimous voice of the people represented in his tale. The narrator, as a witness, has presented Israel in the depths of darkness – a woman violated and broken by her own kinsmen – and he issues an imperative to "all who see", specifically the reader, to consider *Her* circumstances and respond! In demanding "all who see" to "Speak Out!", both Israel and the narrator speak the protest and the appeal of the silent, nameless woman. The violence perpetrated against her disallows complacency on the part of any who have "seen", both within the world of the narrative and without.

The Levite's summons succeeds in bringing the Israelites together as "one body"

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[156] Trible (1984: 81). One would think that subtleties such as this would have cued Trible to the sensitivity of the narrator to the woman and her circumstances.

in Mizpah (Judg 20:1, 8, 11).[157] The body of Israel – broken through violence – endeavors to reassemble itself. But the reassembly cannot be complete: the tribe of Benjamin is alienated from the community because of the crime perpetrated by the men of Gibeah. The Israelites demand an explanation from the Levite for his outrageous summons: for the *ra'ah* (רָעָה), or "evil", of the summons itself, and the "evil" to which it seeks to draw their attention.

The Levite's account of events (Judg 20:4-6) is somewhat different from the account provided by the narrator – and the differences are telling. Through what the Levite says, and what he does not say, we are given a picture of his moral and psychological degradation. He communicates that he feared for his life, but he does not communicate the fact that the men of Gibeah also threatened to humiliate him in the process. Is the sexual nature of their threat unspeakable? What *is* unspeakable is his complicity in the crime against his concubine. He accuses the "Lords of Gibeah" of having forced or raped his concubine/wife to death, but he does not admit to having put her out to them himself (or to the possibility that he might have ultimately killed her in the process of dismemberment). To do so would be to acknowledge his own cowardice and guilt in her brutalization. Does he banish the thought from his mind in order to avert utter demoralization? By omitting his complicity in the crime has he rationalized it in his own mind in order to live with himself? Is this what those put in a position of making "choiceless choices" must do to function in the world? Put in such a position must we create a counter-reality, a reality of self-deception?

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[157] A female-identified reader is left wondering whether the assembly of all of Israel includes *the women* of Israel. Given the militaristic content of the subsequent narrative the presence of women in the assembly is doubtful (though they are most certainly present as the objects of military aggression) (cp. Josh 8:35). Washington (1997: 345) notes the difficulty texts such as these pose for the female reader: she must constantly assess whether her gender is incorporated within a collective noun or whether a masculine pronoun designates both men and women, or only men. This problem, of course, is not confined to biblical literature.

In the counter-reality described by the Levite, little attention is paid to how the events might have been experienced by the woman. His speech is peppered with first person singular pronouns. He presents the outrage in Gibeah as an offence against himself and mutes the offence done to the woman. The Levite's summary of events has the effect of highlighting the sensitivity of the narrator to the woman. Lost in the Levite's account is the pathetic image of the woman lying in the street, at the threshold of the door that shielded her husband from physical injury. Of course it is lost, for her speech-act implicates her husband in the crime! Lost also is a description of his "non-response" to her broken condition – a response which is completely at odds with what the situation demands.

The Levite's final words to the "assembly of the people of God" (Judg 20:2) involve a word play: the "*country of the inheritance of Israel*" (שדה נחלת ישראל), Israel's *naḥalah*, is juxtaposed with "folly/wantonness in Israel", *nebalah* (Judg 20:6). The latter compromises the former. In making the claim that the men of Gibeah have committed *nebalah* in Israel, the Levite echoes the earlier indictment of the old Ephraimite. While the old man applies the term to the threat of rape posed by the rogues against the Levite, the Levite applies it to the rape of his concubine as well. Not only have the men of Gibeah breached the laws of hospitality, they have breached the laws governing appropriate sexual relations in Israel; they have transgressed sacred boundaries in the person of the Levite; and they have violated the sanctity of life by taking that of a defenseless Israelite woman (or at least they have contributed to her death). The men of Gibeah have done what "ought not be done" in Israel, and in so doing they have disrupted the social order, compromised the covenant with God, and defiled the land that is Israel's inheritance. Their crimes, perpetrated at the heart of the nation, are indicative of Israel's rebellion against God. According to Deuteronomic law the pollution of bloodguilt must be eliminated from the land so that it might be

preserved for Israel (Num 35:30-34; Deut 21:8-9).[158] Israel is thus compelled to take up arms against the offenders in her midst in order to restore the social order, her relationship with God, and preserve her *naḥalah*. Israel must root out the "Vine of Sodom".

The private story of the Levite and his concubine mushrooms into one that includes the entire nation of Israel. One woman – divided – results in the unification of the tribes against Benjamin.[159] At a metaphorical level the woman who figures Israel is reassembled, creating the macabre image of an Avenger of Blood "knit together as one man" (Judg 20:11) with the wounds of dismemberment still etched across his/her body. When the Benjaminites refuse to hand over those guilty of the crime in Gibeah – their brethren – civil war ensues. Israel has learned the "art of war" only to exercise that art upon itself (cp. Judg 3:2)![160] While at the outset of the Book of Judges, God appoints the tribe of Judah to go up first against the other nations (Judg 1:1-2), here, at the conclusion of the book, God names Judah, the tribe of the nameless woman, to go up first against Benjamin (Judg 20:18). In both instances Israel's inheritance is at stake.

The events of Judges 19 are not only causally connected to those in Judges 20-21; the two units are also intrinsically related to each other thematically as well as analogically. While the literary structure of Judges 19 emphasizes contrast, a pattern of intensification characterizes the narrative that follows.[161] Events in Judges 19 initiate a

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[158] Washington (1997: 344-345) makes the assertion that the Deuteronomic war laws "are productive of violence: they render intelligible and acceptable both warfare (20:1-20) and an institutionalized form of rape (21:10-14). These laws valorize violent acts, construe them as essential to male agency, and define licit conditions for their exercise."

[159] In the story of Jephthah's daughter events in the battlefield have disastrous consequences in the home (Judg 11:29-40); in the story of the concubine a reversal occurs, domestic events lead to mayhem on the battlefield.

[160] The narrator makes this art explicit in his detailed accounts of the battles against Benjamin, particularly the final one.

[161] As noted earlier, a similar pattern is at work in the narrative unit comprised of Judges 17-18 in which one theft is magnified into mass theft.

continuous cycle of violence in Israel that involves thousands. The narrator's attention to numbers throughout the narrative serves to emphasize the exaggerated proportions of the conflict that follows (Judg 20:10; 15-17, 21, 25, 34, 44-46). The encirclement of the house of the old Ephraimite by the men of Gibeah is echoed in the encirclement of Gibeah by the Israelites. The rape of the woman is metaphorically related to the military conquest of Gibeah and the decimation of the tribe of Benjamin.[162] Having killed all the Benjaminite women (Judg 21:16), the concubine's rape is then multiplied into the rape of many when Israel attempts to secure new women for the remaining Benjaminites (six hundred): the virgins of Jabesh-gilead (four hundred) and (+) the virgin daughters of Shiloh (two hundred) (Judg 21). The crimes of Judges 19 serve as "leaven" for even greater crimes; Israel has become a leaven for evil instead of for good.[163]

As the account of the war against Benjamin unfolds motifs from the story of Sodom continue to find expression.[164] Like Sodom, Gibeah is utterly destroyed, but it is

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[162] Washington (1997: 346) articulates the metaphorical relationship between rape and military conquest in biblical discourse, particularly in Deuteronomy: "Given the linguistic milieu where cities are so often portrayed in the figure of a woman – either mother (Isa. 66:8-13), queen (Isa. 62:3), or virgin daughter (Isa. 37:22), a woman married (Isa. 62:5), widowed (Isa. 47:8, 9; 54:4; Lam 1:1), or raped (Jer. 6:1-8; 13:22: Isa. 47:1-4; Nah. 3:5-6) – the concentration of feminine forms in Deut. 20:10-20 inescapably evokes the figuration of the city as an assaulted woman. In issuing the command to draw near to a city 'in order to attack *it*,' this text effectively enjoins the soldier 'to attack *her*' (להלחם עליה, 20:10). The description of the submissive city 'opening' to the warrior (ופתחה לך, 20:11) evokes an image of male penetration. Similarly, the law uses the verb חפש to describe the military seizure of a city (להלחם עליה לחפשה, 20:19), the same term used for the forcible seizure of a woman in sexual assault (וחפשה ושכב עמה, 22:28)."

[163] Cp. Genesis 18:18-19. Here God articulates the vocation of Israel: through Abraham and his progeny all the nations of the earth are to be blessed.

[164] Alter (1994) examines the allusions employed by the author of Judges 19-21 that link the Judges narrative to the Sodom narrative, allusions that draw the Judges 19-21 it into the "broader horizon of meaning" established in Genesis (see esp. 39-40). Contra Soggin (1981: 282).

destroyed by the hand of men rather than by the hand of God (Judg 20:37; cp. Gen 19:24). Smoke, like that which rose up from Sodom, rises up from the decimated city of Gibeah; and like Lot's wife before them, the Benjaminites look behind themselves to behold the disaster (Judg 20:40; cp. Gen 19:26-27).[165] In the Genesis narrative the catastrophe results in a problem of progeny for the household of Lot; in Judges the elimination of every Benjaminite woman and the Israelites' collective vow never to give their daughters to Benjaminites as wives (Judg 21:1) creates a problem of progeny for the tribe of Benjamin. This problem is "resolved" in the Genesis story through the *incestuous rape* of Lot by his two daughters. In Judges the problem is "resolved" through two maneuvers that involve *murder* (ironically even the murder of *children* [Judg 21:10]), *betrayal*, *abduction* and *rape*. In both instances endogamy is preserved, but the offspring of the illicit unions have ambiguous status in the biblical texts: the Moabites and the Ammonites are born of the union between Lot and his daughters (Gen 19:37-38); and the problematic figure, Saul, is later born of Benjamin (I Sam 9:1-2).[166]

Given the "extravagance of violence"[167] described in Judges 19-21, it is quite astonishing that some commentators see in the conclusion of the book of Judges a depiction of the tribal assembly "functioning at its best".[168] Alberto Soggin argues that

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[165] Cp. Josh 8:11-20 for parallels with the battle of Ai, a battle waged against the Other. Josipovici (1998:121) observes that Judges frequently parodies narratives contained in the texts that precede it in the corpus. Perhaps the echo relationship that exists between the violence perpetrated in Israel between brothers, and that perpetrated upon the nations by Israel, expresses an underlying anxiety or guilt on the part of the narrator for Israel's treatment of the people of Canaan. As Israel has done to its own, so too has it done to the Other. Though the events recounted concern internal relations in Israel, the people of Canaan always stand in the shadows of the narrative.

[166] Some commentators see an anti-Saul /pro-Davidic polemic at work in the concluding chapters of Judges: see, among others, Brettler (1989), Globe (1990), and Amit (1999: 342-350).

[167] Trible (1984: 65-91) entitles her discussion of Judges 19, "An Unnamed Woman: The Extravagance of Violence."

[168] Soggin (1981: 302). Niditch (1982: 374) doubts that Judges 19-20 "ever reflected a historical example of the league at work", but she claims the tale "provides an ideal model of an Israelite league in action and,

the thrust of Judges 19-21 is anti-monarchic, that the narrative unit *affirms the existence and effectiveness* of the tribal assembly. He claims:

> . . . the session and the decision of the assembly is meant . . . to show how useless (the institution of the monarchy) was, compared with the existence of a representative organ of all the tribes, fully capable of maintaining law and order in Israel, by force if necessary.[169]

In a similar vein, Yairah Amit makes the following statement:

> . . . according to this story, during the days of the judges and their tribes there was a strong central leadership in Israel, that acted in a balanced and responsible way and out of national consciousness. *These chapters are thus a "song of praise" to the functioning of the pre-monarchic frameworks.*[170]

Surely the brutality wrought by Israel in these chapters is not a sign of "balanced and responsible leadership". There is something terribly wrong with the doings of

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more important, supports, extols, and exemplifies those values most important to the maintenance of such a league, denigrating and denouncing that which is destructive of it. Holy war for the sake of the *community's good* is fully sanctioned." (emphasis mine). See also Mayes (2001: 254).

[169] Soggin (1981: 300). In taking this position Soggin is at a loss when it comes to dealing with the pro-monarchic blanket condemnation of events expressed in the final words of the book, "In those days there was no king in Israel, every man did what was right in his own eyes" (Judg 21:25). He notes the incongruity and leaves it to others to provide some clarity on the subject (280-281).

[170] Amit (1999: 339) (emphasis mine). Like Soggin, Amit also finds it problematic that a text celebrating the effectiveness of the tribal assembly, as she would have it, should be imbedded in a "pro-monarchic" discourse. Her conundrum is expressed in these words, "it is surprising that the recommendation of the institution of the monarchy was done by description of an institution that had proven its viability perhaps even better than any known royal model" (p. 339).

Israel! To uphold certain principles the chiefs and elders of Israel compromise others. Compassion for one party yields violence against another. Like the old Ephraimite and the Levite before them, the chiefs and elders find themselves in the position of having to choose between one form of evil and another. In upholding the Mosaic injunction to eliminate "Evil" from the land they nearly exterminate the Benjaminites whom they recognize as their own brothers (Judg 20:23, 28; 21:6)! Though some amongst the tribe of Benjamin are guilty of the heinous crime in Gibeah, others are put to the sword for the lesser crime of harbouring the guilty. Also, to uphold the vows they have made against wedding their daughters to Benjaminites, and to preserve the principle of endogamy in Israel, the Israelites victimize other daughters of Israel: first the virgin daughters of Jabesh-gilead and then those of Shiloh. This twice repeated crime is "rationalized" in the minds of the Israelites as necessary for the preservation of the house of Benjamin.

Peggy Kamuf, in her insightful article, "Author of a Crime", observes the terrible ironies at work in Judges 19-21: "Israel thus averts the threat to its unity and continuity as a whole by prescribing the crime that it had to avenge in the first place, by legislating and enacting in an exceptional manner the contrary of the law *as* the law."[171] She notes further that in this "twisted story of crime and punishment . . . (v)ictim and victimizer, avenger and offender . . . (exchange) roles over time and in the course of events".[172]

The outrageous nature of the deeds of Israel in these chapters evokes Voltaire's social satire, *Candide*. Not only is the violence so excessively extreme, it is almost comic that the Israelites should come up two hundred women short after their first expedition to secure virgins. We can just imagine the elders scratching their heads trying to find another solution when, "Aha!" they remember that virgin women come out of the protection of their father's homes to dance at the Festival of YHWH in Shiloh.

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[171] Kamuf (1993: 193).

[172] Kamuf (1993: 194).

Josipovici detects the play of satire in the text:

> The whole episode of the concubine . . . serves to alert us to the fact that this book operates under the sign of irony, that to grasp its theme fully we must be aware of the ways in which it distorts motifs and episodes found in other parts of the Bible. We are so used to thinking of the Bible as a serious, even solemn book, that we find it hard to realize that there are places where the narrative becomes as self consciously ironic and satirical as anything in Chaucer.[173]

Robert Boling describes the events of Judges 20-21 as a "comedy of correctness".[174] He observes that nearly everything the Israelites do is strictly proper and based on precedent in the tradition; and where precedent does not exist, as in the case of securing brides, the elders are "ingenious" in finding a resolution to the problem created by their actions. But the solutions to problems employed by the Israelites at this time "*when there was no king*", are essentially "anti-solutions". Kamuf observes that the cycle of violence ends "only when the original crime is repeated under the guise . . . of the law", that the remedy resembles the injury so closely that no "healing" has

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[173] Josipovici (1988: 118). Satire is a means to social criticism. Recognizing dark humour in Judges 21 does not in any way undermine the seriousness nature of the events recounted. The great satirists of literary history were profoundly sensitive to horror and injustice in the world, and they used humour to make their contemporaries self-consciously aware of their own participation in such horror and injustice. The play of satire in Judges 21 is missed by Alice Bach (1998: 3) who asserts: "While an event of rape is not acknowledged openly in Judges 21, it is encoded within the ambiguity, the indirections of the text. The result is to *naturalize the rape*. By reading against the grain of the writer's intention to narrate the carrying off of women as wives for the men of Benjamin as *necessary and natural*, one sees how the biblical authors, men who possessed both benevolence and reason, could *inscribe a rationale for oppression, violation, and exploitation within the very discourse of the biblical text*" (emphasis mine).

[174] Boling (1975: 294). See also Webb (1987: 189) regarding the "correctness" of the Old Ephraimite's offer.

occurred because of it.[175] While the violence of Judges 19 is *illicit* in nature, the violence in Judges 20-21 is *licit*, or legitimized violence. But, be they crimes of evil, or crimes perpetrated for "the greater good", they are equally outrageous.[176]

Lillian Klein, in her study of the Book of Judges, focuses her attention on the play of irony in the text. In the cyclical pattern that characterizes the larger narrative she sees a continuing downward spiral of moral and social disintegration in Israel, a disintegration that follows upon Israel's separation from God. Klein notices an intensification of irony in the concluding chapters of the book and observes: "the book of Judges does not resolve; it devolves in disorder."[177] The ordering of the universe that was accomplished by God at the outset of Creation, an order which was to be reflected in the covenant community of Israel, is here undone. The events of Judges, and particularly those narrated in the coda of the book, mark a *de-creation* of God's order in the world and a darkening of God's vision for the world. The land of Promise has become a land of Death.

The coda of the Book of Judges comes to a close with the words, "*In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did what was right in his own eyes*" (21:25).[178] These words echo the words of Moses to the people of Israel as they were about to enter into their *naḥalah*, the "Promised Land" (of Canaan): "*You shall not act as we are acting here this day, each man doing that which is right in his own eyes*"(Deut 12:8). But Israel fails miserably. As Josipovici observes, "we seem everywhere to be asked to

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[175]Kamuf (1993: 198).

[176] See also Webb (1987: 195-196).

[177] Klein (1989: 190).

[178] The NRSV translates the phrase as "*all the people did what was right in their own eyes.*" Levy (2000: 51-52) suggests that the concluding phrase "every man did what was right in his own eyes" is indeed male oriented; that it is a "sharply critical, pseudo-formulaic ending, now heavily charged with moral and emotional indignation"; that it is "no mere formulaic ending, but a masterful condemnation of the status of woman."

read Judges as a parody of Genesis and Exodus."[179] Like the shifting patterns of a kaleidoscope, patterns that characterized Israel's behavior before her entry into Canaan are fragmented and *re-presented* in multifarious forms during the period of the Judges, and these patterns shift and spiral into a dark hole at the centre of the land. Everyone does what is right in his/her own eyes: some with evil intent and some with good intent; but in this time when there is no king/King in Israel, even those with good intentions are unable to discern the path of righteousness.[180]

In his juxtaposition of horror and humour – a terribly dark humour – the narrator of Judges 19-21 constructs a profound critique of the ways of the people of Israel. At the same time he also observes the conundrums[181] that arise for a people seeking to follow the way of righteousness. Judges 19-21 is, among other things, an exposé on crime and punishment. Kamuf makes this insightful observation about the workings of the text:

> Man's law finds itself condemned to take up again in its own name and on its own

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[179] Josipovici (1988: 121).

[180] Contra Boling (1975: 63) who sees the conclusion of Judges as "positive and hopeful". He argues that the words, "every man did what was right in his own eyes", have a positive thrust at the conclusion of the book given the "ingenious" nature of the solution contrived by the elders to solve Benjamin's problem of progeny (p. 293).

[181] Contemporary evidence of such conundrums appear daily in the newspaper. Recently in Montreal, a man was sentenced to four years in prison for abducting his daughter and spiriting her away to Lebanon, to a new family, thereby separating her from her birth-mother for nine years. To rectify the wrong done to the mother, and to preserve the social prohibition against kidnapping, it could be argued that the man *should be* charged and incarcerated. The daughter, however, has been utterly alienated in the process: she has no relationship with her mother and resents the incarceration of her father. A commentator for the Missing Children's Network, Patrick Bergeron, made the following comment: "I think the irony in a case like this is that justice is served in court. However, the human tragedy is that we are now left with a young girl who is probably upset and confused, and who doesn't understand why her father is going to jail. And she will probably blame her mother." (*Edmonton Journal* 21 Apr. 2001: A8)

> account the crimes that it seeks to punish, risking otherwise the loss of the very name by which it is authorized to judge and sanction vengeance (and wrongdoing). Thus the guilty one will also be the avenger, the avenger will also be guilty; the victim will be made culpable and the criminal victimized.[182]

In our attempts to serve justice, or to preserve some measure of goodness in situations gone awry, oftentimes we wreck havoc in the lives of the innocent. Von Kellenbach rightly observes, "Judges 19-21 portrays morally ambiguous decisions for survival and muddled pathways into the future."[183]

Is the Book of Judges a piece of pro-monarchic propaganda, a text that sets the stage for the institution of the monarchy that follows in I and II Samuel?[184] If such were the case, one would expect I and II Samuel to be pro-monarchic texts, but the attitude expressed in these texts about the monarchy is rather ambiguous, in fact, it is more critical than celebratory. Both Judges and I and II Samuel are most certainly concerned with leadership and its exercise, but I am not convinced that one form of human leadership is held up to be superior to another. Rather the texts hold up a light to the muddled attempts of Israel to meet the moral demands of being God's chosen people. Judges posits the problem of Evil: it gives it many faces, even the face of legitimization, and it explores Israel's handling of the problem. The resolutions adopted by the people of Israel in the face of Evil and disorder are rarely heroic, for their problems are rarely

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[182] Kamuf (1993: 205) (bracketed material my own).

[183] Von Kellenbach (2000: 187).

[184] Globe (1990) argues that the disintegrative structure of Judges is designed to affirm the necessity of the monarchy, and specifically the monarchy of the house of Judah under David. Brettler (1989) takes a similar stance but makes the further argument that Judges 19-21 functions as a polemic against the monarchy of Saul: "this unit's main function is to denigrate Saul, the Benjaminite from Gibeah who ascended the throne by helping Jabesh-Gilead and was eventually buried by them (I Sam 31:11-13). Saul is defamed by association of tribe and city . . ." (p. 413).

black and white. As Israel goes forward in history she must grope her way through a moral minefield in the gray areas that separate good from evil.

CONCLUSION: FROM GIBEAH TO *GUERNICA*

Her head rears upward as she screams, her jaws are opened wide, her teeth are bared and her tongue is sharpened to a point. Her scream pierces the silent medium of a canvas painted in black and white and deepening shades of gray. Looking upward she tries to raise herself, her legs buckling under her. A huge gaping wound splits her side and a spear pierces her body through. This brutalized figure is the figure of a horse, the central figure of a painting like none other, Pablo Picasso's *Guernica* (Fig. 3).

Picasso painted his mural in response to the saturation bombing of the small Basque town of Guernica in Spain. On April 26, 1937, German bombers acting on orders from General Franco decimated the town of six thousand. It was market day in Guernica.[185] In one commentary on the painting we read:

> In *Guernica* Picasso expresses what one critic had described as a "monumental outcry of grief at its most anguished." In the distortion of familiar subjects – a screaming horse, grizzly animals, a broken child, tormented adults, displaced eyes, ears, profiles and limbs – Picasso has made a more stunning portrait of war's cruel reality than even a camera could record.[186]

The central figure of Judges 19 is an unnamed daughter of Israel. She, like the horse that figures so prominently in Picasso's painting, is utterly brutalized in the narrative. Though Picasso and the artist who crafted Judges 19-21 express themselves through different media, they share a common artistic vocabulary and sensitivity to the brokenness of the human condition. Picasso's painting, therefore, serves as a visual

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[185] One is reminded of the tribe of Dan's surprise attack on Laish, "a people quiet and unsuspecting" (Judg 18:27); and of the parallel account in Judges 19:22: the encirclement of the Ephraimite's home by the rogues of Gibeah as its occupants were enjoying his warm hospitality.

[186] Trueman, Schaffter, Stewart and Hunter (1969: front page).

[This page has been removed due to copyright restrictions. The image removed was: **Figure 3: Pablo Picasso, *Guernica*, 1937, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Spain**. It can be found in: Frank Russell, *Picasso's Guernica: The Labyrinth of Narrative and Vision* (London: Thames & Hudson Ltd., 1980]

analogue to the literary representation of violence and social chaos found in the final three chapters of the Book of Judges.[187]

As in Judges 19-21, women and their experience of violence figure significantly in the chaos of Picasso's painting: in the left panel of the mural a bereaved mother holds a child in her arms – a child white in death; in the right panel another woman, aflame like a piece of timber, falls from a burning building. The mouths of both women open upward in screams that "echo" those of the horse at the center. Another woman kneels at the right, her arms cast outward, her gaze directed upward toward an electric light at the top of the composition, her body language – inquisitorial. Above her, another woman cranes her neck out of a window with her right arm stretching into the darkness to hold up a lamp – a lamp that illuminates the horrors below.

In the image of Picasso's Lampbearer we might picture the narrator of Judges 19-21, for like the Lampbearer the narrator is a construction of the author/artist. The Lampbearer pushes past a curtain which might shield her from viewing the scene – a curtain of complacency, indifference, fear (?) – to *witness* the mayhem below, but also to expose it. As we follow the surfaces that her light touches, a story is told without comment. Her illuminating presence allows us to "read" the mural, both the positive and negative spaces, just as we read the words and the silences of Judges 19-21. Through the activity of the Lampbearer, as through that of the narrator of Judges 19-21, the viewer/reader is made to witness a terrible crime. Frank Russell, in a sensitive commentary on *Guernica*, describes the Lampbearer: "With her light and her muscular arm she insists on what is before her, demanding our engagement."[188] We see in her gesture a visual expression of the imperative voiced at the conclusion of Judges 19, "Consider it, take counsel, and speak out!" (19:30.)

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[187] In exploring the parallels between the two works I have ascribed the feminine gender to the horse represented in *Guernica*.

[188] Russell (1980: 37).

The Lampbearer in *Guernica*, like the narrator of Judges 19-21, is not an indifferent observer: her eyes, the most natural in the composition, express her anguish; her hand presses against her heart in shock; her mouth opens in a gasp of horror. These are her people, this is her world, *and this* is what has become of them. In the face of the Lampbearer Russell sees a representation of the artist himself:

> The artist of course can never be altogether absent, the most hellish catastrophe must be told by someone who can pull himself together and summon the detachment to tell it ... Picasso himself, through the medium of his lady with the lamp, was his own most eloquent bystander, and faced over the years with the disasters of war he has confronted us with the outlines of his own distress – outlines translated and fixed in the lightbearer's face. Like the artist, the lightbearer conveys a clear-seeing, a classic sympathy, and perhaps something larger and more impersonal, art, truth; a tragic mask no less than a projection of the artist she narrates the Guernica with an incorruptible grace and serenity of feature which is itself a kind of song, detached from the event while suffused with it.[189]

The voice of the narrator of Judges 19-21 is "detached from the event while suffused with it", for as we have seen, though the voice of the narrator is matter-of-fact in tone, the manner in which the story is told reveals a profound sensitivity on the storyteller's (author/narrator) part. The deep design of Judges 19-21, its tensions, its imagery, its nuances, its excesses, even its silences, all have the effect of leading us to the woman in horror and sympathy.

The focal point of Picasso's composition – the horse screaming in agony – is an image drawn from the bullrings of Spain. Russell provides a gut wrenching description of the role and fate of horses that enter the bullring:

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[189] Russell (1980: 116).

> (Horses) who have outlived their ordinary usefulness . . . go blindfolded into the bullring, there to rattle their brittle bones into position under the iron-protected heels of the picadors. Once in place the confused beasts find themselves lifted like a load of hay on the ends of two horns, charged and impaled again and again at full speed by an antagonist so furious as hardly to take notice of the picador's pike, and of course, usually dies of the wounds . . . Overflowing with muscle, the bull is everything the picador's dilapidated mount is not – nonetheless the goring of the horse, unsporting as it may look, is not simply a regrettable by-product, it is virtually a part of the strategy of the bullfight. The bull demonstrates his power and partially exhausts himself in lifting the hapless scapegoat: in this way it is the horse who takes the edge off his strength, and the bull is sufficiently slowed down to be in properly weakened condition for the banderilleros and the matadors with their footwork. Thanks to the horse's passive and helpless intervention, human beings do not usually die in the bull ring. . . . Through the horse's death, too, the catharsis of the bull's passion is accomplished, his horns wetted, and his brutality extinguished . . . [190]

Russell makes the further observation that ". . . the Picador's horse is never in life at the center of her own drama."[191] She is relegated to the sidelines early in the "game" as the battle between the men and the bull continues to a bloody end.

The parallels that exist between the figure of the horse and that of the unnamed woman in Judges 19 are disturbing. Like the defenseless horse the woman also has little or no control over her own destiny. She is sacrificed to a brutal mob in Gibeah so that her husband/master might be spared humiliation and possible death.[192] She, instead of him, is penetrated again and again at the end of so many phalli, her femininity and

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[190]Russell (1980: 44-46).

[191]Russell (1980: 46).

[192]The Levite confesses his fear that the men of Gibeah intended to kill him when he offers his account of events to the assembly of Israel at Mizpah (20:5).

vulnerability juxtaposed with the masculine brutality of her rapists. Like the bull, the men of Gibeah give expression to their power through repeated assaults upon her person, their passions exhausted only with the coming of dawn. Would she not have screamed a scream like that of the horse with its tongue sharpened to a point, a scream that would pierce the darkness? Though the narrator does not give the woman "voice", like Picasso's canvas the text is infused with a sense of audibility[193] – in the silence of the text we can imagine her screams through the long dark night.

Picasso once explained, "The horse represents the people."[194] So too does the unnamed woman. Violated and dismembered she becomes a symbolic representation of the brokenness of the body of the Israelite community. In Gibeah, covenantal law which binds the children of Israel together as an ethical community before God collapses. Although Israel unites in an effort to re-establish the rule of Torah in the land, her efforts succeed only in magnifying the injury. The war that ensues between kinsmen fails to accomplish healing and restoration; the victimization of women and those with whom they are associated continues – the gaping hole in Israel's side splits open and her guts spill forth. Artificial is the calmness that marks the conclusion of Judges (21:23-24); it belies the terrible brokenness of the people in the land, a land that has opened its mouth to receive the blood of brothers (cp. Gen 4:8-11) and that of the women and children associated with them. Like the Warrior who lies fallen and broken at the base of Picasso's composition, Israel the Warrior, the "Avenger of Blood", the "Champion of Justice", is utterly ineffectual. Israel has learned the art of war only to engage in an act of self-mutilation.

The death of innocents is represented in Picasso's image of a mother and child. The woman's mouth opens in a shriek that mimics that of the horse. Her breasts, exposed, hang above the lifeless body of her child, one full, the other emptied from recent suckling. In the pair Picasso evokes the image of a Madonna and child, an image

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[193] Russell (1980: 15).

[194] Russell (1980: 43).

transformed by violence into that of a Pietà. Stigmata mark the hands of the child as well as those of the mother. Though Picasso's style is decidedly modern, in this pair he draws upon traditional Christian imagery to involve the religious imagination of the viewer. Jerry Meyer examines the use of religious imagery in postmodern art and his comments are highly applicable to our appreciation of *Guernica*. He notes:

> Postmodernist artists intent on engaging contemporary culture in issues of political portent have referenced religious images and formats in order to invest the aesthetic artifact with a power and authority still resonating with the shadow of its former religious context.[195]

The author of Judges 19-21 employs a similar artistic technique: he evokes dark memories of the story of Sodom (Genesis 19) in his narrative. To what purpose, we might ask, does the storyteller utilize this "strategy of elaborate allusion"?[196] Alter makes the following assertion:

> It is easy enough to admire the artistry of biblical narrative within the limits of an episode, and much keen analysis in recent years has been devoted to just that task. But it is equally important to see how the episode is purposefully woven into larger patterns of motifs, symbols, and themes, keywords, key phrases and plots, for otherwise we are likely to under-read the individual episodes and grasp at best imperfectly *the broader horizon of meaning* toward which the biblical writers mean to lead us.[197]

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[195] Meyer (1997: 19).

[196] Alter (1994: 39).

[197] Alter (1994: 41) (emphasis mine).

Echoes of Sodom in Judges 19-21 reactivate fundamental themes at work in the Genesis narratives: the theme of God's covenantal promise to Abraham; the contingency of the fulfillment of that promise upon the performance of righteousness and justice by God's chosen people; and also the theme of divine judgment.

In the Book of Genesis two men, Abraham and Lot, receive unexpected visitors. God intrudes into the pattern of their "ordinary" lives: first three men of God/God appear to Abraham (18:1-2); then two appear to Lot (19:1). The first visitation brings with it a blessing – a promise of "life" through progeny in spite of barrenness; the second effects catastrophic death and destruction. The narrative impresses upon us that *nothing* is "*too wonderful for the LORD*" to accomplish (18:14). As "maker of heaven and earth" (Gen 14:19) both life and death are His to control.

But the destruction of Sodom serves another pedagogical purpose; following the account of God's promise to Abraham and prior to His destruction of Sodom, the narrator presents a debate within the mind of God:

> *The LORD said, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, seeing that Abraham shall become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? No, for I have chosen him, that he may charge his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice; so that the LORD may bring about for Abraham what he has promised him."*
> (Gen 18:17-19)

Abraham is to be a witness to the destruction of Sodom, to God's intolerance of human depravity, so that in sharing the story with his progeny he might encourage them to embrace "*the way of the LORD*". Through the negative example of Sodom it becomes clear that it is incumbent upon Abraham and his children to establish a just society in order for the LORD to bring about what he has promised. Sodom presents as the antithesis of such a society. The behavior of the men of Sodom, "both young and old",

is emblematic of a society organized against the will of God (Cp. Isa 1:10-17, 3:9; Jer 23:14-15; Ezek 16:49). The sterility of their sexual intentions runs counter to the creative purposes of God. Whereas God "comes into relationship" (*yada'*, וידעתיו) with Abraham so that all the nations of the earth will be blessed through him (Gen 18:18-19), the men of Sodom seek to "come into relationship" (*yada'*, ונדעה) with the men of God in order to do violence to their persons (Gen 19:7-8). Alter argues that, "The story of the doomed city is crucial not only to Genesis but to the moral thematics of the Bible as a whole . . . because it is the biblical version of anti-civilization."[198]

The Book of Judges traces Israel's efforts to establish itself in the land of Canaan, but it simultaneously reflects the activity of God in history, an activity directed toward the working out of His promise to Abraham. In Judges 19-21 we witness the re-emergence of the "Vine of Sodom" *in the midst of Israel*, a thwarting of God's efforts exercised on Israel's behalf. Through their violence – a violence focalized in the body of a woman – the children of Israel put at risk the covenantal relationship that God established with Abraham and compromise their covenantal claim to the "Promised Land". In the context of Judges 19-21 the words of Ezekiel are apropos: "*As I live, says the LORD God, your sister Sodom and her daughters have not done as you and your daughters have done.*"(Ezek 16:48); "*. . . you were more corrupt than they in all your ways.*" (16:47).[199]

In the final three chapters of Judges forces of "brutality and darkness" threaten to undo God's vision for his chosen people. Picasso's *Guernica* provides us with a visual analogue of forces such as these in the image of the Bull. Though at one time

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[198] Alter (1994: 32-33).

[199] Ezekiel 16:46-47 evokes the remarkable image of three young women walking hand in hand, Israel at the centre with her elder sister Samaria at her left hand, and her younger sister Sodom at her right. Together, sister Samaria and sister Sodom lead daughter Israel along the path of wickedness until she herself takes the lead. This image is lost in the translation offered by the NRSV. Ezekiel 16 has been described by some feminist critics as pornographic; see note 206.

Picasso explained, "The bull is not fascism, but it is brutality and darkness," on another occasion he resisted investing the figure with any meaning; he argued, "It is necessary that the public, the spectators, see in the horse, the bull, symbols that they interpret as they understand them. They are animals. These are massacred animals. That is all, for me; let the public see what it wants to see."[200] The Bull, therefore, is an enigmatic figure. He stands menacingly over the bereaved mother and her child. His neck turns away from the screaming horse, away from the gigantic wound which is pierced in her belly. His eyes, however, do not follow – they are displaced in his face. Staring forward his expression is both confused and one of confusion. Russell offers this commentary on the Bull:

> In this horned and dangerous creature which is planted both in the action and out of it, seeing and not seeing, uttering and not uttering, knowing and not knowing, one sees a strength no less baffled than that of the swordbearer. Its contrary qualities take the shape of a brute, but brutality has its own contradictions – wrenched and abruptly twisted as we see it from black to a lurid white – and must be said, too, to suffer; one has only to study its unfocusing, seeking eyes.[201]

In relation to our text we might see in the Bull a representation of both the men of Gibeah as well as the Levite himself. Their status in the narrative is mixed: we recall Kamuf's observation that in the final three chapters of Judges, "(v)ictim and victimizer, avenger and offender . . . (exchange) roles over time and in the course of events."[202] The enigma of the Bull, the beast of the bullring, both the perpetrator of violence as well as the ultimate victim of violence, parallels the status of the house of Benjamin in Judges 19-21. While a number of Benjaminites – the men of Gibeah – are initially

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[200] Russell (1980: 56).

[201] Russell (1980: 61).

[202] Kamuf (1993: 194).

guilty of perpetrating a heinous crime against a "stranger in their gates", *all* of Benjamin suffers punishment for their crime. Guilty of harbouring the wicked, the tribe is put to the sword. But Israel's excessive exercise of retributive justice threatens the house of Benjamin with near-extinction. As the story unfolds, the victimizer becomes the victim.

With respect to the Levite the obverse occurs: threatened himself with the horror of rape he casts his concubine to the rogues to suffer his intended fate. He participates in the crime against her. Having done so the Levite, in a manner similar to Picasso's Bull, "sees but does not see", "speaks but does not speak", "knows but does not know". In full knowledge of her fate, he does not respond through the long dark night. The door and the darkness shield his eyes from viewing her torment. Might he also have blocked up his ears so as not to hear her screams? When he finds his woman/wife on the doorstep in the morning, he refuses to acknowledge her brokenness. He fails to "speak" the words the situation demands; instead, his words to her suggest that all is "normal"! He cannot bring himself to *really* see her condition, for to focus his attention on her brokenness – to direct his heart to her – would be to acknowledge his own complicity in the crime perpetrated against her. Like the Bull whose unfocused eyes possess a "quality of absence", the Levite refuses to face the reality of the situation.[203]

Though the Levite "sees but does not see", though he "knows but does not know", within the world of the narrative there is the suggestion that the eyes of another are witness to the horror "illuminated" by the narrator. Prior to their entry into the land of Canaan Moses reminds the people of Israel that the eyes of God are always upon the land which he has promised to them, "*from the beginning of the year to the end of the year*" (Deut 11:12). As we read the words that conclude the Book of Judges, "*every man did that which was right in his own eyes*" (21:25), we recall the refrain repeated time and again in the chapters preceding the coda: "*The children of Israel did what was evil in the eyes of the LORD.*" In Judges 19-21 Evil takes shape in multifarious forms

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[203] Russell (1980: 180).

and God is witness to it.

The "all-seeing" eye of God is suggested in Picasso's *Guernica* as well: an electrical ceiling fixture resembling an eye is positioned directly over the head of the screaming horse. Sharp triangular rays of white and black, however, ring this fixture; its light is explosive, like the light created by the flash of a bomb. Its role in the composition is ambiguous: it appears to be a secondary source of illumination to the lamp held by the woman at the window, and like her it "observes" the chaos below, but the explosive aspect of the fixture also suggests that it might be *the source* of that chaos.

The ambiguous role of Picasso's light fixture mirrors that of God in Judges 19-21. Given the contextual relationship of the coda to the rest of the Book of Judges – a book that presents God as the Maker of history (cp. Judg 2; 10:11-14) – we must ask if the God of Israel is more than just *a witness* to the tragic circumstances surrounding the death of the concubine. We must ask if He is in fact the Author of the crime against her and all those victimized in the cycle of violence that ensues?[204]

In Judges 19 God is seemingly absent, but in the narrative that follows God offers directives to Israel when it goes to battle against Benjamin (20:18, 23, 28); God is said to have "*defeated Benjamin before Israel*" (20:35); and, with the near-extermination of Benjamin, God is said to have "*made a breach in the tribes of Israel*" (21:3,15). Would not God's role in the death of many be the same as his role in the death of "one"? Must we entertain the possibility that God is behind the terrible brutality inflicted upon the unnamed woman? Is she, like Benjamin, the subject of divine punishment for wrongdoing?

God's retributive justice is a prominent theme in the Book of Judges. In light of this, the violation of the unnamed woman might be considered a form of "poetic

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[204] Exum (1990a) explores the role of God in the stories that comprise the Book of Judges and his possible complicity in the violence and death that dominate the book. When considering the final chapters of Judges she asks, "Is Israel, like Samson, abandoned to its own folly and being brought to ruin by Yhwh?" (p. 430).

justice". Webb observes:

> At the beginning of the episode the concubine 'plays the harlot' (זנה); at the end she becomes the common property of the men of Gibeah (19.2, 25). The grim irony suggests that *from the narrator's point of view there was an element of justice in the concubine's fate*. We are reminded of Samson who did what was right in his own eyes and ended up by having his eyes put out (14.3; 16.21), or of Abimelech who killed his brothers on a stone and was killed himself by having a stone dropped on his head (9.5, 53). [205]

We might also note that the relationship between the concubine and the Levite mirrors that of Israel and her LORD in the rest of the Book of Judges. The prologue (chapters 1-3:6) encapsulates the recurrent pattern of the book as a whole. In it we read that the LORD, in his anger at the unfaithfulness of the children of Israel, "*gave them over to plunderers who plundered them*"; "*sold them into the power of their enemies all around*"; and raised His "*hand . . . against them to bring misfortune*" (Judg 2:14-15). The shared fate of Israel and the concubine in Judges seems to echo a prominent motif in the prophetic texts, one in which God is figured as a jealous husband who gives over His unfaithful wife, Israel, to be violated by a multitude of rapists:

> *Adulterous wife, who receives strangers instead of her husband! . . . I will gather them against you from all around, and will uncover your nakedness to them, so that they may see all your nakedness. . . . I will judge you as women who commit adultery and shed blood are judged, and bring blood upon you in wrath and jealousy.* (Ezek 16:32-38; cp. Jer 13:20-27; Hos 2:1-13; Mic 4:11) [206]

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[205] Webb (1987: 188) (emphasis mine).

[206] The prophetic texts noted above are a concern to a number of feminist critics who find the violence they depict against women highly problematic. In *On Gendering Texts* (1993), Brenner and van Dijk-Hemmes

These parallels reinforce the notion that the violence done to the concubine in Judges 19 is a manifestation of divine retribution, that God is the ultimate source of the forces of "brutality and darkness" that overtake the woman in the course of the narrative.

But, when faced with the woman's terrible violation and the brokenness of the nation she represents, we are compelled to ask, "Is this the doing of a just God?" Though the woman cannot be counted among the righteous, the violence done to her person seems to far outweigh her crime; and though some Benjaminites are guilty of an unspeakable crime, the retribution wrought upon the tribe as a whole is extravagant, to say the least. We find ourselves reiterating the question posed by Abraham to God prior to His destruction of Sodom: "*Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?*" (Gen 18:25).

If it is assumed that the narrator embraces the doctrine of divine retribution we might well conclude that the narrative presents the rape and humiliation of the unnamed woman as warranted and justified.[207] But if, as I have argued, the narrator's sympathies

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examine the "divine husband/erring-human-wife" metaphor in prophetic texts and draw a parallel between imagery involving the rape and humiliation of a woman (Israel/ Zion/ Jerusalem) and pornography. In a series of articles in *A Feminist Companion to The Latter Prophets* (1995), the subject is debated further by Brenner in "On Prophetic Propaganda and the Politics of 'Love': The Case of Jeremiah"(256-274), and by Carroll in "Desire under the Terebinths: On Pornographic Representation in the Prophets – A Response"(275-307). See also Gordon and Washington in the same collection of articles.

[207] Exum (1995: 84) offers the following assessment of the dynamics at work in the text: "A woman who asserts her sexual autonomy by leaving her husband . . . is guilty of sexual misconduct. This is the ideology that determines the way gender relations are understood and evaluated in this story. In the end, the woman is raped by a mob and dismembered by her own husband. As narrative punishment for her sexual "misconduct," her sexual "freedom," she is sexually abused, after which her sexuality is symbolically mutilated . . .. Why is the dismemberment, a superfluous act of violence, necessary? It conveys to women an implicit message about sexual behavior. By leaving her husband the woman makes a gesture of sexual autonomy so threatening to patriarchal ideology that it requires her to be punished sexually in the most extreme form." Underlying Exum's argument is the assumption that the narrative affirms the doctrine of retributive justice.

lie with the woman, as well as with the women and nation that she represents, then his tale might be better understood as an *indictment against God*, for in representing the "extravagance of violence" that takes place in the heart of Israel the narrator confronts us with "radical suffering and genuine evil".[208] Does the narrator mean to posit a situation so brutal and bizarre – yet not unimaginable – that we must either challenge the validity of the notion of *divine causality* or entertain the possibility that *the God of Israel is a God of Evil?* Confronted with the excess of violence and confusion of justice in Judges 19-21 it is difficult to argue for God's omnibenevolence if one considers Him to be the architect of *everything* "in heaven and earth".

While the text gives expression to the fundamental debate of *theodicy* – a debate that arises time and again in the discourse of a monotheistic people confronted with "radical suffering and evil"[209] – the text opens up other possibilities as well. As I have suggested earlier, perhaps God is represented in the text as the victim of violence in Israel rather than the victimizer. God is seemingly absent in Judges 19; the realism of the tale does not allow for "divine intervention" on behalf of the concubine. But if we understand the woman's identity to be absorbed into that of her husband, a Levite, and by extension also into that of God, then God is indeed present in the narrative: God is present in the person of the woman, in her vulnerability, and in her suffering.[210]

The concept that God participates in human suffering brings to mind a haunting narrative by Elie Wiesel in his autobiographical account of "life" in Auschwitz, *Night*.

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[208] In *(God) After Auschwitz* (1998), Zachary Braiterman examines traditional theodicies in biblical and rabbinic literature and the development of a counter-tradition which he designates antitheodicy, "the religious refusal to 'justify,' 'explain,' or 'accept' the relationship between God and evil" (p. 20). This counter-tradition has gained some currency in the work of a number of post-Holocaust thinkers.

[209] See Braiterman (1998) for a contemporary articulation of this debate.

[210] God's participation in human suffering is a notion that is embraced and expanded upon in Christian theology. The Christian tradition, however, teaches that the suffering and death of Jesus on the cross has redemptive value. Such is not the case in Judges 19; the fate of the unnamed woman speaks only of chaos and darkness and of the *absolute necessity* of redemption. See note 144 regarding the possibility that Rembrandt adopts crucifixion imagery in his drawing entitled, The *Levite Finds his Wife in the Morning.*

He recalls the hanging of a young Jewish boy. The weight of the boy's body was not sufficient to make his death swift. Before the eyes of those assembled he struggled on the rope "between life and death" for more than half an hour. A question formed on the lips of one man who stood as a witness, "Where is God now?" Wiesel heard a voice within him answer, "Where is He? Here He is – He is hanging here on this gallows. . .".[211]

In considering the role of God in this narrative, then, we must hold in tension two possibilities: that the God of Israel – like the concubine, the Levite, the tribe of Benjamin, and the people of Israel as a whole – is both a victim and a victimizer in relation to His people. In this enigmatic narrative *all* occupy the gray area that spans the distance between good and evil.

In Picasso's mural of gray on gray, of darkness and despair, there is a suggestion of hope: it finds expression in a tiny flower that emerges from the ground at the center of the composition. The flower is so small and finely sketched that it is easily overlooked, but as we seek to reconfigure the dismembered body of the Warrior who lies at the base of the painting we stumble across it. It rises out of the ground where the Warrior's hand, still clasped around the broken shaft of a sword, lies fallen.

In the darkness and confusion that overtakes Israel in the final chapters of the Book of Judges, it is difficult to see any hope. Paradoxically, Israel's only hope lies in the very One who may have orchestrated her misfortune. It lies in the possibility that YHWH, "*the LORD (who) kills and brings to life; (who) brings down to Sheol and raises up*" (I Sam 2:6), will effect a new beginning. We must look beyond the book of Judges to see this accomplished, to I Samuel where God responds to the "barrenness" of Israel in the person of Hannah. He hears her silent prayer and opens her womb to issue new life. In so doing the LORD undoes the "de-creation" set in motion by the rape of a nameless young woman in the heart of Israel.

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[211] Wiesel (1987: 70-72).

I have offered here a defense of the narrator/author who stands accused of "rape by the pen". I have endeavored to challenge the notion that the story of the Levite and his concubine "justifies evil" and to question the perception that the text contributes to the perpetuation of violence against women. I have argued that the narrator's sympathies lie with the woman, who is also Israel, and that he leads us to her with compassion. It is he who protests her fate and gives voice to her anguish. He speaks through her silence. To exorcize a text such as this from the biblical corpus would be to silence a Lament, for the teller of this tale might well have spoken words such as these:

What can I say for you, to what compare you,
O daughter Jerusalem?
To what can I liken you, that I may comfort you,
O virgin daughter Zion?
For vast as the sea is your ruin:
Who can heal you?
(Lamentations 2:13)

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